

Bye-Bye Mulder: THE X-FILES Episode Guide

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BLADE 2

TOUGHER THAN BUFFY

PLUS:

THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES

SCORPION KING SIX FEET UNDER

THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE

RESIDENT EVIL E.T.

April Volume 34 Number 2

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marbled with hothouse
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to love.
The inability
to love...

The **hunger**
to love.

TROUBLE EVERY DAY

A Film by **CLAIRE DENIS**

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VOLUME 34 NUMBER 2

"The Magazine with a Sense of Wonder"

APRIL 2002

I don't want to go overboard on this, but I've really had it with BEAT THE GEEKS. You've seen it, haven't you? It's a quiz show on Comedy Central that pits your basic array of contestants against a line-up of four "geeks:" a film geek, a movie geek, a music geek, and a "special guest" geek—might be STAR TREK one day; might be SOPRANOS the next. The civilians battle for cash and prizes while the geeks, bedecked in regalia that would've made Liberace blush, stand at their spot-lit podiums and answer questions between hurling insults at their opponents.

Comedy Central has had a lot of luck finessing geekishness into mass entertainment. WIN BEN STEIN'S MONEY plays off the fact that the legendary TV and movie nerd (oh, and Nixon speechwriter) is also a pretty formidable intellect; BATTLEBOTS is basically a science fair as reconfigured by Tim Allen ("More power, huh-huhr-huhr!"). BEAT THE GEEKS takes WIN BEN STEIN'S MONEY and pulls it off the international stage, quadrupling the geek component to compensate for the lack of Stein's media celebrity.

And that would be okay, really, if the network gave its knowledge-masters the same dignity Stein uses to offset his deadpan schtick. Yet there the geeks are, draped in their satin gowns, talkin' their pre-scripted trash, and the only thing I can think of is all the sf conventions I've attended where we were in the conference rooms arguing the sociological import of Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* while the local press remained outside, taking pictures of the hall costumes. There's my concept of geek, which takes into account a certain amount of serious intent, and there's the rest of the world's, which too often seems to boil down to, "Ah-ha-ha, lookit the fat guy in the STAR TREK outfit!"

I don't want to take anything away from the show's regulars, who off-camera are probably having a pretty good laugh at their on-screen personae. Thing is, others are laughing as well, and I'm not so certain it's the same joke.

—Dan Persons



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Spielberg tinkers with the classic for its twentieth anniversary, turning ET from convincing animatronic into even-more-convincing CG, and disarming the cops while he's at it. **Chuck Wagner** talks with the effects specialists about what's old and what's new..

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Publisher/Business Manager: Celeste C. Clarke. **Editor:** Dan Persons. **Bureaus:** New York Dan Scapperotti. Los Angeles Mitch Persons. London Alan Jones. **Contributors:** Katie Anderson, Dan Coyle, Edward Gross, Miwa Hirai, Alan Jones, Dennis Kleinman, Andrew Osmond, Mitch Persons, Roxie Ray, Dan Scapperotti, Paula Vitaris, Chuck Wagner, Paul Wardle, Mike Watt. **Editorial Operations Manager:** Lisa Tomczak-Walkington. **Editorial Production:** Lisa Coduto. **Circulation Manager:** Mickey Wright. **Advertising:** Jason Paul Collum.

PHOTO CREDITS: ©2002 ABC, Inc. (4R); Bandai (56, 57); © Disney Enterprises, Inc. (4B, 61); © Fox Broadcasting (Doug Hyun 39, 41T, 48-49B, 55; Ken Staniforth 40-41R; Merick Morton 42B; Randy Holmes 43B; Larry Watson 43T, 44-45R; Rob Brown 49T; David Gray 51); © Jim Henson Company (5); © Lot 47 Films (62); Mastersfx, Inc. (8, 9); ©2001 New Line Cinema (22, 23, 24-25B, 25T, 26, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 60); ©2001 Screen gems (Rolf Konow 10, 11, 12, 13; Melissa Moseley/SMPSP 20, 21); © Sony Pictures Classics (Miguel Bracho 36, 37); © Sony Pictures Entertainment Co. (4T, 64T); Bruce Talamon (24T, 27, 31, 35); ©1981 Universal Studios (52B); © 2001 Universal Studios (Darren Michaels 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19); ©2001 Universal Studios/Ambin Entertainment (ILM 6, 7); ©1984 Bob Villard (53); W.M. Creations, Inc. (46, 47).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Diane Cooper, MastersFX, PFA Entertainment Inc., Pixel Magic, Larry Tetewsky, Tippet Studio, Jeff Ward. **COVER:** New Line Cinema.

CINEFANTASTIQUE (ISSN 0145-6032) is published bi-monthly at 7240 W. Roosevelt Rd., Forest Park, IL 60130. (708) 366-5566. www.cfq.com / mail@cfq.com Second class postage paid at Forest Park, IL 60130 & additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to CINEFANTASTIQUE, P.O. Box 270, Oak Park, IL 60303. **Subscriptions:** 6 issues \$26, 12 issues \$48, 18 issues \$69. (Foreign & Canada: 6 issues \$34, 12 issues \$55, 18 issues \$80.) Single copies: \$8. **Worldwide Distribution** by Curtis Circulation Company, 730 River Road, New Milford, N.J. 07646. (201) 634-7416. **Submissions** of artwork and articles are encouraged, but must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Contents copyright ©2002 by Celeste C. Clarke. CINEFANTASTIQUE ® is a Registered U.S. Trademark.

PRINTED IN USA. But dreams of a romantic, continental holiday.

CFQ Preview

The "We're Really, Really Sorry About Summer, 2001" Edition

Compiled by Dan Persons

STAR WARS EPISODE II: ATTACK OF THE CLONES

May 16

(Fox)

Fans were starting to line up in January to see this next installment. Guess we're over September 11th. Meanwhile, the question isn't whether this will be a darker, more mature story, but whether Lucas can overcome his obsession with digital filmmaking long enough to reawaken the storytelling skills that made the original STAR WARS the phenomenally good sf fantasy it was.

SPIDER-MAN (Columbia)

May 3

Love the costume—the classy, sculpted web-look clearly telegraphs that the filmmakers are determined to treat this property with the respect it deserves. Love the casting—Tobey Maguire is picture-perfect as Peter Parker; Kirsten Dunst as Mary Jane and Willem Dafoe as the Green Goblin feel like perfect complements. Love the director—between EVIL DEAD, DARK MAN, and A SIMPLE PLAN, Sam Raimi could be one of the few people skilled enough to find the balance between gravity and wit that this origin tale demands. In short, we're jazzed, and if the whole film is as stunningly realized as the trailer (a tall order, admittedly), we'll be in sheer heaven. Go for it, Sam!



DINOTOPIA (ABC)

May

Agoraphobics need something to look forward to as well, and what better than this mini-series adaptation of the acclaimed, illustrated-book series? Preview tapes bear witness that this island utopia—where intelligent dinosaurs and humans live together in harmony—has been lushly realized (with the help of our friends at the Henson Creature Shop for the animatronics, and CG house FrameStore for the digital creatures). As for the drama? Well...let's hope that the Halmi's have learned enough from the miscues of THE 10TH KINGDOM and THE



LOST EMPIRE to restore their rep as the source to turn to for literate fantasy.

SPIRIT: STALLION OF THE CIMARRON

May 24

(Dreamworks)

Like THE BEAR, this animated feature is told from the horse's point of view, but without resorting to having the animal actually speak (a narrator will convey Spirit's thoughts and feelings). Sounds interesting, looks beautiful. Here's hoping it breaks Dreamworks' bad streak with traditional animation.

MINORITY REPORT June 28 (Fox)

Give Spielberg his props: He's not one to shy away from a challenge. First Kubrickian dystopia, now Phil Dick surrealism—so much for those who thought he was going to settle into WWII permanently. Tom Cruise is the man on the run from police out to arrest him for a crime he has yet to commit (yup, Dick all the way). What follows may not necessarily be very Dickian (we're only guessing, of course—as usual, Coca-Cola doesn't guard its secrets as fanatically as Spielberg's warders), but it's probably not going to be all that cuddly, either. Can the director pull off this drastic shift of *metier*? Did he follow up JURASSIC PARK with SCHINDLER'S LIST?

LILO & STITCH (Disney)

June 21

Good buzz on this, which, after the disappointments of ATLANTIS, THE EMPEROR'S NEW GROOVE, and DINOSAUR (not to mention getting their faces rubbed in it by SHREK and even MONSTERS, INC.), must be tremendously reassuring to Disney animation. Lilo is an Elvis-obsessed Hawaiian tyke. Stitch is the ugly little dog she adopts, hardly dreaming that the creature is actually a seriously malign genetic experiment from outer space. Hearts will be melted, no doubt, and the press materials overtly state that Stitch will be learning the importance of "family" (big surprise—curse you, William Bennett!), but since this is coming out of Disney Animation's Florida operation, whose MULAN was a strong jolt of adrenaline when the company needed it, there may well be more here than mere G-rated squishiness.



Ben Browder Faces the Future

FARSCAPE Star Looks Forward to Upcoming Seasons

by Miwa Hirai

John Crichton's alter ego, Ben Browder, described, with characteristic zeal, how his character has changed across the span of the Sci Fi Channel's hit series, *FARSCAPE*: "Oh boy! Crichton of Season Three is virtually unrecognizable as the Crichton of Season One. To look at him now, you might confuse him with the peacekeepers."

"John Crichton used to be one of us in many ways. He represented humanity in the other universe. He had the same kinds of struggles we did, which were violence, wars, and danger. His references were our references. John was somewhere in post-modern construction. He deconstructed the alien universe for us.

"In Season One, John had no idea what he was up against. He was so desperate. Then he grew to a point where he could hold onto the road. The next season was about what was done to him and how he behaved after he got thrown into the Aurora Chair and Scorpy put the chip in his head. He was responding more abruptly and violently than he would have before. His sanity was fractured."

"Season Three is a blur.... What happened? Where did the nine months go? The thing about *FARSCAPE* is, it would be a memorable day on set if nothing happened. So much goes on, usually all at once—often involving alien goo—that it's hard to pick out the individual moments. If pushed on the subject, I could narrow it down to a couple of hundred memorable moments involving Claudia Black." Browder grinned.

Browder was currently enjoying a hiatus in Australia. "I have been spending time with my family, bit of surfing and bit of writing. Nothing too spectacular, except one afternoon testing a racecar. There is *nothing* like losing control of a racecar. Forget therapy—you need a new attitude? Take up stock car racing."

When Crichton was "twinned" by a demented alien aboard a rotting Leviathan ship, Moya's crew was split into halves, one set con-



Earthling John Crichton, as played by Ben Browder, (left) has gone from cosmic wiseguy to conflicted twins. But what's in store for him in *FARSCAPE*'s future?

tinuing on in Moya, and the other on Talyn, with a Crichton to each ship.

"First, they...we two Johns, are equal and original," Browder said. "We have two separate journeys going on here. Playing the two Johns was almost as confusing for me as for the audience. Not really... though there were some shaky moments on set when the wrong colored shirt arrived. The color-coded Crichtons made life much easier for me, especially as we often shoot parts of several different episodes on any given day—just check the color and you're off. Black: Dead John Walking. Green: More misery ahead."

Not satisfied with the daunting task of playing double-roles in the same series, Browder also penned an episode of *FARSCAPE* ("Green Eyed Monster"), which centered on how John, Aeryn, Crais, and Talyn must struggle to overcome their own animosities and work together to survive. "For me, the driving principle of the episode was to squeeze it, contain the action, and allow us to play multiple and extended character scenes, something we do not often have time for, what with the large production-value pieces of most *FARSCAPE* episodes. What jazzed me was the prospect of doing a *FARSCAPE* riff

on jealousy. And the producers gave me the task of getting Aeryn off the fence, so to speak. So to make my job easier, I made it all about Aeryn. The hard thing was making the time to write. I wrote late at night, ten P.M. to three A.M., and on weekends. I'm still tired."

Although shooting of Season Three wrapped up a while ago, the key episodes of this season have been held back until early spring. A rumor has been spreading lightning-fast among fans that someone very familiar may be seen returning to the screen in the very last episode of the season. Can Browder shed any light on what's in store for *FARSCAPE*?

"I know what happens, what we are going to see at the start of next year. I've been locked in with writers for the last two weeks working on scripts for the next season. Season Four is coming fast upon us, and we only had the entire writing staff here in Australia for a couple of weeks before some of them had to return to the States. I am, however, contractually bound not to discuss any future plot points."

FARSCAPE has been officially renewed for its fourth and fifth seasons on the Sci Fi Channel, making it the longest-running original series in the cable station's history. The writers will be seeking to inject

a lot of vivid and interesting elements into the next two seasons by introducing various new factors, which for Browder will only intensify his broader involvement in the production process. In addition, many unresolved aspects have been left for the next season. Is a new approach to the Crichton/Sun relationship in the works?

"Let's have them shack up together and live happily ever after," Browder said. "The chances of that are so slim, drama being drama, that I would settle for them having dinner and a movie. Again, we know that ain't going to happen. Perhaps we can hope they won't kill each other." He laughed.

What about Browder himself? What wild and crazy thing would he like to see Crichton do before the series finale, whenever that may be? "I hesitate giving any ideas. The writers might read this, then they would twist the idea into some form of extreme torture which I would be subjected to; probably half-dressed and involving some form of alien slime. I'll just stay quiet and hopefully survive this next year."

Browder recognizes the fan communities on the Internet and that *FARSCAPE* is a very fan-based show. "In my opinion, what makes *FARSCAPE* stand out amongst other sci-fi shows is neither character or story. There's very little new in the universe as far as those things go; it's the kinks and twists that make the difference.

"It's all about execution. Honestly, when things work, I think it's a chemistry thing. We have a great number of talented people who work on the show. They are passionate, creative, and committed. But beyond these single ingredients, something else happens. *FARSCAPE*, by its eclectic mix of Aussie, English, and American sensibilities, has a rare voice. The show embraces a wide range of ideas and approaches to story—telling, blending them in a way that is unique. The show has a kind of sweet-and-sour thing going on.... It shouldn't work together, but it does. It's tasty." CFQ

E.T. Goes CG

Digital Tech Gives Alien New Life but Raises Issues About Tampering with a Cinema Classic

By Chuck Wagner

The negative was in pretty good shape," said Industrial Light and Magic's Bill George, Visual Effects Supervisor for the 20th Anniversary re-release of E.T. THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL. "It had a lot of scratches on it, but overall it was in pretty good shape. My first reaction was the reaction that I think a lot of people have when they hear they're going to redo parts of E.T.: 'Well...Why?' Then I watched the film and I realized why. A lot of technology changes that have happened over the past twenty years have educated a lot of people as to what to expect when they go to see a film. The way you remember it and the way it is are different things.

"I think 'renovation' is the correct word for what we did."

Of course, Steven Spielberg had a list of things he thought needed to be done to what is generally considered his greatest film. "Mostly we added to that," said George. "The thing to remember is not only was this twenty years ago, but E. T.—believe it or not—was a very low-budget film. I'm really not sure exactly what the numbers were,

but it was done very inexpensively."

Of course, the cast was relatively unknown. Drew Barrymore might command a high salary now, "...but not back then," George admitted. "What happened with this re-release, though I wasn't at that meeting, was that Steven went through the film and pointed out things that he would like to change or alter. What it came down to was mostly all the visual effects from the first film, and then about sixty shots of E.T.—the puppet E.T.—that he was asking us to digitally remove and replace with a CG version to get a finer-honed performance."

Designed and executed by Carlo Rambaldi, the original E.T. raised eyebrows for its expense, but wasn't as elaborate as its price tag might suggest. "It was a whole collection of techniques that added up to the one performance. They had four or five different E.T.s, and they would use them where appropriate. They

TERRYCLOTH DISGUISE: The towel that hid the work of puppeteers in the original E.T. has been retained, but the police have had their guns digitally excised. **RIGHT:** ILM Visual Effects Supervisor Bill George.

also had one with a little person in it that would shuffle around. We ended up doing about sixty-five shots, and my guess is that less than five percent of E.T. is now CG.

"Our goal was that when people go to see this film, they're not going to realize that it's been messed with. Whenever we could, we used the original backgrounds, like, for instance, the sequence with the kids on the bikes. Before, they were puppets—little twelve-inch-tall puppets that were shot in stop-motion. We replaced them with photo-double real kids on real bikes with moving fabric. They're moving the

same way—maybe a little more animated—but we used the exact same background image.

"You know, it's going to feel like the same film, but hopefully you won't be distracted by some artifacts of the effects techniques of 1982. I don't know who made the decision that ultimately we needed to change these things, but there were probably also things that Steven was unhappy

with the first time around. You've got budgets, schedules, limitations, and a puppet that can only do so much. Through the years, he might have decided that he's wished he'd done it differently. But, really, the changes that we made are very, very subtle.

"Down at Dreamworks, I think they went through and cleaned the negative and struck a new print. When it came to our work, all we handled were the new effects shots. In a lot of ways, this project was very out of the ordinary for us. Traditionally, when a shot comes in, it's like this: They shoot the negative and make a selection. They send us the nega-



tive on a teeny spool, because it's just one shot. We put that onto our scanner and run it through. Then we've got our image and we go. We always want to go off the original negative, because that's the highest quality image you can get.

"Here you have a film—one of the most successful and best-loved films of all time—where the negative was all cut. The original negatives of all the effects shots were still available on those little spools, so that wasn't a problem. But for the production footage—such as a shot of E.T. in the bedroom, where we wanted to replace him—the original negative was cut and conformed to the film. It was hard-

FACE TIME: Digital animation removes the mechanical vestiges of the original E.T. (with Henry Thomas, right). **BELOW:** A younger Steven Spielberg works with Thomas.



is that it's purely post-production. Normally we're involved in pre-production, the design phase, supervising the plates being shot during production, and then we go into post and put everything together. With E.T., it's all been shot and designed, so we went right into post-production. We needed to build the E.T. puppet, shoot the kids' photo-doubles on the bikes, but aside from that, it was basically a post-production show."

spliced in.

"It was a real challenge for us—and something I really fought for—to use the original negative. What that involved was taking these two-thousand-foot reels of negative, putting them on our machine, and very slowly and laboriously by hand going through to get to the shot and then scanning it. What we did was scan the frame before and the frame after the shot, just to make sure we had the entire frame range. It was a pain in the butt!

"Colin Brady, who was one of the directors on TOY STORY 2, was the animation director. He did an awesome job. Lots of our CG characters are fast moving, violent, explosive, and in-your-face. E.T.'s not. Colin did a really good job of keeping the animators grounded. E.T. moves slow. He moves like a turtle. He's cold-blooded. He has majesty to him. We used, whenever we could, references to the original puppet to drive our CG animation. It wasn't like we wanted to do something new and different. It was more to get more empathy out of his face or less of a head-bobble. A lot of times when his head was extended and the head turned, the mechanics became apparent. That was the type of thing we were taking out.

"We worked on the project about six months. What's interesting about this show

tion show."

Photo-doubles? Well, it isn't as if Henry Thomas would look as good on a Huffy as he did twenty years ago. "We found kids that were amazingly close in appearance to the originals," George said. "I have to say there aren't too many shots that get me all worked up as a supervisor, but redoing the shot of Elliot and E.T. riding in front of the moon, it was like, *Oh my God, this isn't a shot. This is an icon!* But it's also that feeling...if you boil down a film into a single image...that's the shot from E.T." (It's also the logo for Amblin Entertainment.)

Still, there was a line over which the effects crew didn't stray. George and his ILM wizards could've eliminated the blanket E.T. wears during the bicycle shots. It's there, after all, to hide puppeteers. "He's still dressed, pretty much," George noted. "You could theoretically eliminate that, but we didn't do all the shots. We only did the wide shots of them flying. It's still Henry Thomas with the puppet. We didn't make any major changes like that."

Like all revisions, though, the re-working of E.T. has stirred up no little controversy. A lot of commentary has flashed around the excision of certain dialog, and the CG removal of the guns held by the officers during the climactic bike chase, cuts presumably made because a 2002 audience

might find these elements to be more menace than is desired. This raises questions of the duty of a filmmaker versus the expectations of audiences. Is there ever a point at which film becomes, or should be regarded as, finished? "It's not for me to say," said George. "We're a service. We're in a division. We're told to do something and we do it. And we try to make it look really good. There are only two shots with gun removal, and two versions of each, so they have a choice. We'll see which one ends up in the film. I have seen one of the new prints, and they're absolutely beautiful.

Nevertheless, George held that the changes do not add up to a huge impact on the overall film: "I think when you add all of our stuff together, it's about thirteen minutes long. I don't want to say we redid the matte paintings, because in reality what we did with the matte paintings was [we] tracked them down—some of them are hanging on the walls here at ILM—photographed them, scanned that, and then used that as a basis, just adding more detail: moving traffic; flying airplanes; more atmosphere; moving smoke; that kind of stuff. The average person is going to go, 'I remember that.' It's very subtle."

This is less extensive than the changes made to the first STAR WARS movie. "One sequence was in the beginning when E.T.'s being chased by the bad men. E.T. is basically on rails during that sequence." In the shot, E.T. seems to slide straight forward during part of that sequence, like a train car, without any other movement. Translation without oscillation, you might call it. "We painted out all those hokey translating shots and replaced them with full animation. Our goal is that when people go to see this movie, they're going to see it like they remember it. Which it isn't, unfortunately, because twenty years have passed. We just don't want people to be distracted by technical glitches." CFQ

SIX FEET UNDER

By Mike Watt

On Christmas Eve, Nathaniel Fisher, of the Fisher and Sons Funeral Home, is driving home in the business's new hearse when a bus slams into him broadside, killing him. While the family has grown up surrounded by death, this is the first time the concept has really hit home. Now the Fisher family must overcome their various dysfunctions and continue on, living to serve the dead.

Alternately a black comedy and serious drama, *SIX FEET UNDER* is one of the newest additions to HBO's original programming line-up. Featuring such talented and eclectic performers as Peter Krause (*SPORTS NIGHT*), Lauren Ambrose

(*CAN'T HARDLY WAIT*), Rachel Griffiths (*MURIEL'S WEDDING*), and Richard Jenkins, who stars as the dead but not quite gone Nathaniel, *SIX FEET UNDER* is the brain-child of acclaimed writer and director Alan Ball, whose moving

features and might have a few too many orifices. That's where the talents of Todd Masters and his MASTERSFX, INC. team are called into play. With a resume that includes such film and television projects as *PREDATOR*, *WHAT DREAMS MAY COME*,

STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT, *CHARMED*, and *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*, MASTERSFX is well-equipped to handle whatever horrors Ball could conjure.

With *SIX FEET UNDER*, the audience is usually treated to only the slightest glimpse of mortal damage, giving the effect that much more impact. While such treatment might be seen as giving MASTERSFX a short-shrift, *SIX FEET UNDER* is not about the

gruesomeness of death, but the effects mortality has on those it leaves behind.

According to Sean Taylor, Vice President and Producer at MASTERSFX, the company doesn't feel slighted at

all. "It's a real thrill to work with someone as talented as Alan Ball. It's sad to say, but many of the projects that feature prosthetic or creature effects leave a lot to desire when it comes to story and character. On *SIX FEET UNDER*, we have the rare opportunity to complement brilliant writing and acting with realistic effects that add convincing texture to the show. We would always prefer to supply prosthetics as a backdrop to fine drama than as a centerpiece to some cheesy effects vehicle."

Masters himself agreed. "Admittedly, many of the projects that helped build MASTERSFX were unfortunately semi-cheesy. Horror shows and the typical slate of projects that employ shops like ours often portray mere cartoons when dealing with violence and the bitter conclusion of



DEATH BE NOT PRETTY: Long familiar with the decorous gore of horror films, the artists of MASTERSFX faced the challenge of representing death in its more real, and less photogenic, incarnations.

A MERICAN BEAUTY won him an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay.

As one can imagine, death in all of its forms is a major player in *SIX FEET UNDER*, and the clients at the Fisher Funeral Home don't always come in looking their best. In the first episode alone, audiences are given glimpses of deceased who are short some facial



life. This show is wonderfully witty, and a real thinker in the way it deals with life's big questions: death; and growth of a family beyond death. The power of the filmmaking inspires our work—our dead characters and effects—to be that much more seamless. Their believability adds to overall tone of the drama.”

Which isn't to say they haven't been given the opportunity to have fun with the tasks given. All filmmakers, and special effects artists in particular, are at heart children on Halloween, trying to best one another with the most gruesome of illusions and grossest of psych-outs. Ball is content to up the ante on mortality, and MASTERSFX rises to the challenge each time. “As the

real fake morticians on the show, we've had the opportunity to create a colorful array of prosthetic and dummy effects,” said Taylor. “From a woman whose head is crushed by a cherry picker while poking through the sunroof of a limousine to the crooked

boobs of an electrocuted porn star, we've run the gambit of interesting ways to die. We even gave an old guy a prosthetic erection, something that apparently happens to some people after death—in the business, they call it 'Angel Lust.'” And yes, Taylor did betray just a hint of glee during those descriptions.

“We've built over a half-dozen corpses,” Taylor said, “many of which are featured in scenes with the actors that the bodies are based on [such as a scene in which Jenkins watches his own embalming]. When you have an actor hovering inches away from his own dummy head in a shot, there's no hiding flaws in the dummy piece.

“As media savvy [viewers] who have seen thousands of images of violence in films, we think we know exactly what happens to a body when it faces any type of trauma. The problem is, we're all wrong. The real stuff looks kind of fake compared to the bloodfest we're used to seeing on screen. But on SIX FEET UNDER, Alan and the producers wanted realism in the effects to reflect the realism of the show—no Hollywood cliches to fall back on. We've done a lot of gut-churning research, looking at thousands of pictures of the real thing to perfect the process of replicating it on screen. We've also had the benefit of guidance from real morticians hired by production as technical advisors.”



SLAB MASTERS: Todd Masters & Co. consulted actual morticians to make the details of **SIX FEET UNDER**, such as the stitches at left, more accurate.

Proving to the audience that civilians don't know as much as they think they do, and then giving them some-

thing even better, is the goal at MASTERSFX. “That's kind of the code with effects: You must continue to grow and develop your skills, constantly reinvent, so to produce the 'special' in special effects. As the demands of entertainment have changed, we've adapted and changed with it. That, I feel, is why we've succeed in this field—no one wants to see yesterday's rabbit trick.”

It is this type of attention that has allowed MASTERSFX to grow in an industry known for inbreeding its own self-destruction. “I started the company in '86,” Masters said. “We started small, with a couple of talented folks and some cheesy movies and grew [from there]. An early big break was *LOOK WHO'S TALKING*, the '80s comedy that starred Kirstie Ally and John Travolta. We created several of its fetus and baby effects. From there, we soon got on some of the *NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET* movies, *THE ADDAMS FAMILY* movies, *MORTAL KOMBAT*, *TALES FROM THE CRYPT*; lots of television, in fact, including *STAR TREK*, *SLIDERS*, *THE PROFILER*, *DARK SKIES*, and some Aaron Spelling stuff. As the company grew, we began stretching our skills by moving into the emerging and challenging world of digital effects. I've had a long and diverse background in visual effects, and mixing in this new medium

offered an attractive method to broadening my palette of tools. We began designing effects that utilized a mix of physical and visual elements; this not only improved the flexibility in our work and allowed our clients better access to the design process, but also added a realism to film's electronic-looking digital effects. These techniques were also a welcome aid to production's skyrocketing effects cost in the mid-'90s.”

While working on any project is demanding, *SIX FEET UNDER* is a weekly cable series, and the pressure is strong to provide high-quality results. Said Taylor, “Whenever you talk about making quality effects for television, you immediately run into two brick walls: time and money. Fortunately, HBO and the show's producers are devoted to making these effects work, and find ways to fit us in their television budgets. But a TV schedule is what it is.

“Most of the time, we have to run day and night shifts. Weekends for our crew are just workdays with less traffic. It's a great lesson in fine-tuning your planning skills. And when you go back to working on a feature film, having all that time seems wonderfully indulgent by comparison.”

“This show often reminds me a bit of HBO's *TALES FROM THE CRYPT*, which we did many years ago,” Masters said. “Every week we're making another feature quality—if not better—segment. It can be stressful holding our standards with the parameters of modern production, but that's what we do. And that's why we've been successful for the last fifteen years. HBO has always been a strong supporter of our work and has really allowed the quality of what we do to shine like no other production group, features, cable, or television. Their interest in our art can really make those late-night and early-morning make-ups worth it.”

CFO

EW RESIDENT EVIL

Is There Any Such Thing as a Good Video Game Movie? Paul Anderson Thinks So.

By Alan Jones

For a while, it didn't seem that the high profile Constantin Film production, *RESIDENT EVIL: GROUND ZERO*, would ever get made. Based on Capcom's best-selling

(*THE WORLD IS NOT ENOUGH*). Numerous genre talents from George Sluizer (*THE VANISHING*) to George Romero (*DAWN OF THE DEAD*) tried writing scripts, but no one could properly crack the concept of taking an interac-

die-hard fan I wanted a movie version that is respectful of it, builds on its premise, and delivers on its promise. To be scary, you have to be unpredictable, and that's why I felt completely free to reinvent the story and use my own set of fresh characters. There was no point in using the Jill Valentine character from the first *RESIDENT EVIL*—the fans would know she wasn't going to be killed because she pops up in the later games. The suspense dynamic of who is going to live, who is going to die, and what people's allegiances are was only going to work with new characters."

Anderson's story, originally titled *UNDEAD*, is set in the Hive, a vast underground genetic research facility where a deadly viral outbreak has occurred, wiping out the entire research staff and bringing them

T-virus escape into the underground laboratory? This film is the explanatory prequel that game players have always wanted to see, using the scary mechanisms and devices that have become part of the *Resident Evil* cyber-culture. I felt the *GROUND ZERO* idea was the correct approach, both for people who had never heard of the game and were unfamiliar with it, and for the avid players who will adore all the references included just for them in the action-packed scenario."

But Anderson has also put his unique mark on *RESIDENT EVIL* by incorporating various references to some of his favorite literary sources. "*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* by Lewis Carroll are two of my absolute favorite books. The similarities in structure between the Carroll literary masterpieces and the game I found quite astounding—in both, a heroine goes underground and comes across many weird things. So I worked in the name 'Alice,' 'Looking Glass House,' and the 'Red Queen' computer—just to mention a few of the references—to give a sub-textual theme to the twisted proceedings. That's not going to come out of left field for the hardcore gamers either. In the last game, *Resident Evil—Code: Veronica*, one of the monsters is named Bandersnatch (a creature from the poem *Jabberwock* featured



DEAD ON LOCATION: Actual sites in East Berlin became the locii for a zombie-making virus in *RESIDENT EVIL*.

computer game, the \$40 million action/horror/thriller was shot on-location and at the new Studio Adlershof in East Berlin (it was only the second movie to do so after Peter Bogdanovich's *THE CAT'S MEOW*), and stars Milla Jovovich (*THE FIFTH ELEMENT*), Michelle Rodriguez (*GIRLFIGHT*), James Purefoy (*A KNIGHT'S TALE*), Eric Mabius (*THE CROW: SALVATION*), newcomer Martin Crewes and Colin Salmon

tive video game and transferring it to the big screen as viable entertainment. That was until Paul Anderson came into the frame.

The director of *EVENT HORIZON*, *SOLDIER*, and *MORTAL KOMBAT*—the latter significantly being the only video-game-to-film box-office success to date—Anderson was more than happy to take a crack at the project. "I'm a huge fan of the game," he said, "and as a

back as ravenous Undead. Alice (Jovovich) and Rain (Rodriguez) lead a crack team of commandos sent in to isolate the T-virus inside the hi-tech complex before Undead can overrun the Earth. To make matters worse, they soon realize that Undead humans aren't the only danger roaming the nightmare corridors of the sinister compound.

Anderson explained his *GROUND ZERO* concept: "What led to the Undead in the mansion? How did the deadly

in *Through the Looking Glass*), so clearly the parallels struck Capcom at the same time they did me."

Anderson's past experiences in the fantasy and science-fiction realms, and his love of the horror genre, also gave him a keen insight into what audiences expect from such a multi-million dollar terror extravaganza. He said, "You can't do today what filmmakers were doing twenty-five years ago. Then, extreme splatter movies like *DAWN OF THE DEAD* and Lucio Fulci's *ZOMBIE* were everywhere, and gore was the modus operandi of the times. To be scary, rather than just gross, I knew we had to be radical with our conception of the Undead. I watched every zombie film again before starting this, and noticed how dated they all looked.

"Then you see something like *ALIEN* from the same era and you realise how clever Ridley Scott was. He had a rubber-suited monster but hardly showed it and created a classic shocker. That's my approach here. It's too easy to gross people out on a splatter level and far harder to scare them senseless. I made a deliberate choice in the script to be frightening rather than visceral—showing everything covered in blood or the usual Italian-style exploitation and cannibalism is now such a dated and hokey approach. Ensuring things are shadowy and tension-filled is the best way to keep audiences shrieking and their nerves jangling. That's why I decided to direct the film after initially only wanting to write and produce it. I didn't trust anyone else to pull that chill-laden atmosphere off."

For the lead role of Alice, the producers didn't have to look too far. Milla Jovovich explained, "I would play the game for five hours every day with my brother Marco, and I thought it was so terrific I wanted to produce a movie version through my own production company. I then found out the film rights had already been snapped up and that Paul was directing. So I met with Paul and said, 'Look, I love the game and you won't find anyone better.' Luckily I convinced him

enough to let me read for the Alice part, and I worked hard to make sure he wouldn't even consider anyone else.

"I wanted to make the movie even more when I first read the script. I remember screaming, 'Yes, they got it right!' Paul has captured the spirit of the game in a highly intelligent and unique way, and I know the game fans are just going to love it."

"Milla has incredible presence and a slightly otherworldly quality to her face that is perfect for a frightening fantasy," noted Jeremy Bolt, who's producing *RESIDENT EVIL* along with Anderson. "It's not easy to find actresses with the required look suggesting hidden depths who can also handle a gun with credibility. Once Milla came on board we all thought it would be a great idea to counterbalance her international star appeal with another female lead from the independent movie arena. Michelle Rodriguez was just exploding as the discovery of the Sundance Film Festival favorite *GIRLFIGHT* and we thought she'd be wonderful as the feisty commando, Rain."

Like Jovovich, Michelle Rodriguez was another besotted fan of the game. She said, "I absolutely adore it, and had said to my agent that if there was ever an offer to appear in a film version that I would drop everything to read the script and take a crack at it. In fact I did turn down a very lucrative Nike commercial to ensure I was available for the film. I've always had the desire to be an action heroine in the Sigourney Weaver mold, and playing Rain meant I could cross two ambitions off my list. Frankly, when I read the awesome script, I would have taken a job as a zombie hot dog seller in the theatre where the film was playing just to be a part of it."

Paul Anderson added, "It was incredible that my two lead actresses knew the game inside and out. They have been my constant monitors with regards

FORCE OF LIFE: Milla Jovovich is an Alice trapped in a less-than-wonderful Wonderland when zombies threaten to take over the world.



to the finer story points, and have told me in no uncertain terms if I'm making any mistakes. Rain was originally written as a much smaller role, but after I met Michelle, I knew it would be a great waste if we didn't use her feisty talents to the fullest extent. Michelle's character is so tough and yet so sympathetic, there's no way any member of the audience is going to guess that Rain will go through some of the most shocking and traumatic events the movie has to offer."

Eric Mabus has had his fair share of disturbing moments too. Anderson was familiar with Mabus's work due to his close friend Bharat Nalluri (*RESIDENT EVIL*'s second unit director), who starred and directed the *CRUEL INTENTIONS* actor in *THE CROW: SALVATION*. Said Mabus, "I love playing characters who aren't what they seem at first, and Matt provided the perfect vehicle for that sleight-of-hand element. Matt has really strong and painful scenes in the scenario, and their emotional honesty was a real surprise, because I wasn't expecting anything like it. Anyone who thinks the film will merely be a superficial adaptation of an awesome video game is going to be proved totally wrong."

To help the actors get to grips with his script, Paul Anderson virtually shot the entire film in sequence. "That meant the cast's off-screen bonding was reflected in their growing on-screen chemistry. James Purefoy even invited his castmates over to his hotel to watch

a screening of *ALIEN*, because he felt it would help their collective performances to see a classic ensemble cast working together in harmony. I can honestly say I've never been happier about all the casting choices for one of my movies before. Their energy and commitment often caused me to stagger back in amazement."

To help him conceive a unique look for *RESIDENT EVIL*, Anderson turned to director of photography and camera operator David Johnson. Said the director, "David lit the Impact Pictures-produced television pilot *THE SIGHT* and I loved what he achieved in that science-fiction drama on a tight schedule. In order to be respectful to the game, I thought the movie should use a similar color palette. So greens and blues are very much in evidence to promote the vibe and the broad overall feel, although I designed the look to change as the movie progresses. The Hive is seen pre- and post-disaster, and then when the emergency lighting is turned off. Those three different atmospheres were carefully designed to become consistently stronger and scarier as the protagonists become more fractured by the Undead."

Johnson, whose credits include *AN IDEAL HUSBAND* and *HILARY AND JACKIE*, said, "Paul is a visually inspired director and that made my job so much easier. I'd describe the overall look as 'grim light industrial,' while Paul likes to use the term 'creamy' for the lighting style. But primarily, the feeling I got from playing the game was the chilling loneli-

ness of it all, and that's what I've tried hard to work into the look. I light really dark corridors without having any shadows in evidence to maximize the feelings of absolute isolation. One of my first jobs in the film industry was working on ALIEN and all the sets on that classic were 'live,' meaning the lighting rigs were built into the constructions. I figured the same choice would be best for RESIDENT EVIL as, apart from a few exterior locations, everything was going to be shot on sets built at Studio Adlershof, and it would make our lives so much easier. So in pre-production, Richard Bridgland and I had to figure out where we were going to put the lights while cleverly incorporating them into his overall production design. It was a difficult task, actually, because the lights all had to be in the right place for story purposes at exactly the right time.

"The one scene I'm most proud of, and where everyone's ideas on the lighting and design side come brilliantly together, is when One is cubed by lasers in the Red Queen computer corridor. It was the one sequence I couldn't wait to tackle, because it was so clear in my imagination from the moment I read the script.

A long corridor of mirror-refracted white lights contrasted by a red laser beam: It looks fantastic, and is my clear homage to 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY."

Like David Johnson, production designer Richard Bridgland also worked on THE SIGHT. The designer, Academy Award nominated for RICHARD III, said, "RESIDENT EVIL gave me the opportunity to do something on film that has never been seen before. I took my inspiration from a number of Japanese architects who design entirely with concrete slabs to create incredibly beautiful spaces. Combined with glass and steel, the design becomes textured, organic, and aesthetically strong. Then, when we found our loca-

tion for the underground train station from Looking Glass House into the Hive, it fitted into the design ethic perfectly. The U-bahn station at the Reichstag is an empty concrete shell that won't be opened to the public until 2004. When we walked in, it was a like a \$5 million set had already been purpose-built for us to use."

Not only did Bridgland design the sets for RESIDENT EVIL, he also doubled as costume designer. He noted, "It is quite extraordinary to do both on a film, but I come from a theatre, dance, and opera background where it's more the norm. Paul said he'd feel happier if I took on both tasks to give the overall design a cohesive look."

From designing Alice's slashed red dress—"Milla and I collaborated on her costume based on a bias-cut, Jean Paul Gaultier outfit that exposed one leg, which she adored"—to giving each commando an individual look by customizing their black uniforms with backpack detailing, Bridgland's wardrobe department created five duplicates of each major player's costume to allow for stunt wear-and-tear, and he also designed all the laboratory equipment, the double helix Umbrel-



TEAMWORK: Fighting against the flesh-munchers (clockwise from upper left): Milla Jovovich, Eric Mabius, and Michelle Rodriguez.

to keep things in the style of the game, but create new things within it, while keeping everything absolutely authentic. The quality of the collaboration between Paul, David, and myself has been total, and it's what I look for in my work experiences. Being left alone never makes great movies. It's the melting pot of ideas being continually discussed and developed that ensures perfect artistry."

To create a totally unique look for the Undead and keep it as far away from any Romero or Fulci influence, Anderson turned to the special effects make-up company Animated Extras International Ltd. Oscar nominated for SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE, Animated Extras created actor Sam Neill's makeup effects in EVENT HORIZON and also contributed to GLADIATOR. "Total realism is the key to the Undead look we devised," commented Animated Extras' Pauline Fowler. "We wanted to create a visual look for the T-virus, because it's breathed in, goes through the system, and comes out via the eyes, nose, and mouth. So we researched every medical textbook to come up with something that

wasn't the traditional rotting flesh, but a real, living organism that eats away at the skin like cold sores. Because the T-virus can be quick-acting depending on the system of the person infected, it gave us lots of variety in the look [of the] diseased mass, although all the

sores are in roughly the same areas, including the fingertips. It would have been a logistical nightmare for my six-man team to cope with the fifty main Undead extras if the sores erupted all over the body. It was far easier, and much more effective, to have the virus concentrated in those key areas. We also made

the Undead look clammy, sweaty, and as ill as possible, so the characters—and the audience—could still think a few were latently human while something awful was clearly happening to them. Specially designed contact lenses, giving the lead Undead's eyes a pus-filled, grungy stare, complete the overall look."

Instrumental to the success of the Undead sequences was Anderson's ground-breaking idea to hire a choreographer to ensure physical fluidity of movement. SWING KIDS dance coach Warnar Van Eeden was the man chosen for the task. He recalled, "Paul was emphatic about the Undead extras needing movement instruction, because he didn't want the slightest chance of them looking ridiculous or laughable as they often did in past zombie films. Nor did he want to remake Michael Jackson's THRILLER video. I told him I would teach the extras not how to move so much as how to feel, and that struck a major chord."

One of the stars of the Undead contingent turned out to be producer Jeremy Bolt. He laughed, "I actually ended up playing three Undead, all in the same sequence. I'll volunteer for anything, I'm reckless like that, and when Paul asked for more Undead, I quickly joined the ranks. I was in make-up for four hours, had my head shaved, cold sore prosthetics put all over my face, my teeth blackened, and blood poured all over my hands. Pauline Fowler told me I was a Grade Two Undead, meaning my viral infection was quite severe. I get shot by Rain over and over again, then I'm seen in the elevator taking a big chunk out of JD's arm, and then I'm in a suit being pulled fifteen feet through the air. I became an honorary member of the stunt department after that."

RESIDENT EVIL: GROUND ZERO began eleven weeks of principal shooting on March 5, 2001, at the Studio Adlershof and on location at the Reichstag U-bahn station, Landsberger Allee, Kaserne Krampnitz, and the Schloss Linstedt. Jeremy Bolt noted, "We did scout locations all over

Europe from Latvia to the Ukraine and looked at underground bunkers in Great Britain and the old German nuclear one in Bonn. The bunkers would have needed a lot of set decoration because they were all too Second World War period-looking for our purposes. But it was the Reichstag station that sold us on making the movie in Berlin, although we had done some prep at London's Shepperton Studios. The production value in using the Reichstag (also used in the Miramax science fiction epic, *EQUILIBRIUM*) as the underground entrance into the Hive was so in-tune with Richard Bridgland's overall design we just had to make the film in Berlin."

Crewes summed up what the entire cast felt about working together. "It's the tight ensemble we've created between the actors that I've particularly enjoyed. Prior to principal photography, we all took part in three weeks of commando training. Former Navy Seal Jaymes Butler was our collective personal trainer and he put us through our boot camp paces and gave us character-building assignments to secure various parts of the studio complex. It was important for Paul that we looked like a team who would rely on each other in times of stress, and with Jaymes's expert guidance we achieved that. Many of the stories' shock twists and turns rely on our teamwork and our focused ability to look like a believable and cohesive unit. I also think it speaks volumes that no doubles were needed for any of our major stunts."

Added Jovovich, "Audiences just won't accept stunt doubles anymore. I know I won't, and I was fully prepared to do everything myself, because it's really important for the audience to be there in the scene with the actor for the excitement value. Edited fight scenes break the illusion and, thanks to all the karate and combat training, I could do jumps, spins, and kicks I've never done before, and body stretches I never thought possible. That was really vital for the complicated action scene where Alice kills five Undead in less than thirty seconds. I thought

I'd trained hard for *THE FIFTH ELEMENT* but *RESIDENT EVIL* pushed me to the limit."

Once all the Undead scenes had been shot to maximize their terror potential—"Seven months of Undead testing really paid off with fantastic results surpassing our wildest dreams," said Anderson—the director turned to the challenge of putting the Licker on screen. "The Licker is one of the defining points for the rabid game player. The creature appears for the first time in *RESIDENT EVIL 2* and is one of the highlights for the entire series. You glimpse blood dripping from the roof and, when you look up, you see this grotesque creature—with its brains exposed and a long, deadly tongue—crawling upside down along the ceiling, that suddenly turns and looks at you with a transfixing, gruesome stare. I knew if we could create that image on screen, we would be instant heroes."

Using a combination of animatronics and computer graphics, the Licker sequence was recreated on-location at the Reichstag U-bahn. Animated Extras built numerous puppets in various sizes to create the eight-foot long, four-foot high monster. Said Pauline Fowler, "We built a three-quarter-length model for close-ups of its eyeless face, and to show its jaw dropping; a half-length battering ram version that is worn over a puppeteer's shoulders; and gloves with talons fixed on so it could rip through metal walls. We gave the creature a raw meat texture by using a mixture of dried stage blood and latex to suggest a sinewy musculature. Although we did build a latex wriggling tongue, it was more to give the actors something to react to on set rather than anything we thought would make the final cut. Digital augmentation will ensure the Licker's tongue is the horrifying appendage it is in the game. We also used thirty litres of surgical jelly to give the Licker a congealed and organic countenance. Game players who know and love the Licker

IT'S AS IF RIPLEY HAD GONE SHOPPING AT VICTORIA'S SECRET: Virulent bio-hazards are no reason not to make a strong, fashion statement.



will be impressed by how much we've hiked up the terror scale."

Responsible for coordinating the computer graphic side of *RESIDENT EVIL* and supervising the entire visual effects is multi-Academy Award nominee Richard Yuricich. The film industry veteran, who includes both *MISSION IMPOSSIBLE* features on his impressive credits list, was also the visual effects supervisor on Anderson's *EVENT HORIZON*. "When you've been in the business as long as I have," remarked Yuricich, "You soon get a sixth sense over who is receptive to your work and who isn't. I found out on *EVENT HORIZON* how much Paul was into the visual effects side of film, and how much he liked to be involved. I'm very comfortable with Paul because he's interested in making this film the best it can be—whatever it takes—and he loves the fantasy genre, because he knows how potently it can fire the imagination. Now that's the sort of demanding person I'm attracted to working with, because together we can make great art."

Although some key visual effects in *RESIDENT EVIL*

are computer generated, Yuricich aimed for CGI quality rather than quantity. "The Computer Film Company is responsible for designing some of the Red Queen hologram, although most shots were simulated by my department. They also enhanced the Licker and the Zombie Dogs scenes. For the latter sequence, CFC animated sections of the Dobermans' eyes and a protruding snout. But in the main I felt we should keep the effects as physical as possible for that extra feeling of palpably real terror. When Alice is attacked by the Zombie Dogs, all that separates Milla from the animals is a sheet of protective glass. I wanted to solve problems like that simply and ingeniously rather than use expensive digitals in post-production."

Said Anderson, "I could have made any number of video game movies, but I wanted to make this one because great video games are like great books. They don't come along too often, so when one does you must grab it. *RESIDENT EVIL* was the first video game since *MORTAL KOMBAT* that I thought would make an exciting and thrilling movie. I feel we've surpassed that milestone with this film."

CFQ

If you saw six-foot, six-inch, 275-pound muscle-machine Ralph Moeller coming at you with an antediluvian broadsword held in his huge hand, you most likely would, to paraphrase novelist Ian Fleming, "get down on your knees and pray for death." Good thing General Thorak, the lead character Moeller plays in Universal's *THE SCORPION KING*, is supposed to inspire such thoughts of mortality. It comes in handy when facing down the hero of a pre-historical Middle East, the Scorpion King himself.

The truth is, the German-born Moeller is an extremely charming, ingratiatingly shy individual, about as far removed from killer

miss me as much, but I don't think so. This man I play, Thorak, he's a bad guy. Lord Memnon, who is played by the English actor Steven Brand, is the main villain. I am actually the right-hand man, the general who follows the orders. If this would be in our time, I would say a kind of hit man, you know? I have an army, and with us, it's, 'We follow our orders, our people die.' It's that simple.

"My orders are, 'Get Mathayus,' who is the Scorpion King, and is played by The Rock [Dwayne Johnson]. Memnon wants The Rock out of the way, because he is threatening to overturn his evil kingdom. So Thorak—that's me—I'm after the Rock's box most of the time.

"In the middle of the film there is an un-

sand in our faces, and it was shocking—that's how we felt most of the time. I really couldn't see, sometimes. I hit The Rock, and he hit me; there was a lot of that. We called it, 'The Execution Fight,' because I had this huge sword, and I wind up dead."

Unlike other action films, where the heavy has no shortage of opportunities to sneer occasionally witty, but more often just cliched, dialogue, Moeller prefers to let his physical presence do the talking. "I rather [the villain] say nothing," he admitted. "I hate it if you say, 'Oh look, there's a fire! We have to escape!' It's not necessary. I think I like movies in the '70s—like *THE GETAWAY* with Steve McQueen and stuff like that—because in the first ten minutes you don't hear anything, no dialogue, noth-

Caught Between The Rock and a Hard-Case: Dwayne Johnson and Ralph Moeller Battle Over Ancient Egypt

Thorak as any human being could be. Approaching a table on one of the sound stages at Universal Studios, he gave a handshake that was surprisingly gentle for a man of his size and muscularity. As he sat, he apologized for being, as he put it, "a little bit nervous.... Never did this. I hope my accent is not disturbing to you."

Moeller's gentleness was used to great effect in his role as Hagen, the good-hearted giant who spared Russell Crowe's life in *GLADIATOR*. "In *SCORPION KING*," said Moeller, "I will leave by page fifty-seven of the script. I hope the audience will

believable scene; it was never done before. [It was shot,] actually, believe it or not, in a sandstorm in Yuma, Arizona. Thorak is trailing Mathayus into the desert. We had almost 110 degrees out there, and there were fifty or sixty horses behind me. We had this brown hazelnut sand being blown into our faces, and in rehearsal I couldn't see anyone next to me. Thorak comes riding in on his horse, jumps from the horse, and a fight starts.

"Now, it comes that the sand, even a little sand, in the eyes can be very painful. It was eight hours of

ing, but you get it all. Right?

"But we're really not trying to make an Oscar-winning movie out of this. We try to be entertaining, and hopefully get worldwide distribution. If it wins something, fine. I wouldn't mind. I already missed the nomination for *GLADIATOR*, so maybe I might get it for the dying scene in this film."

A dying scene at the hands of The Rock. Battles on horseback. A merciless sandstorm. The average actor just might cave in under such pressure. Did Moeller or The Rock have to go through any special prepara-

tions for the grueling stunts? "The Rock—he is a great guy—he is in top shape because of his wrestling with the WWF.

He exercises, works out

at Gold's Gym. I exercise, too.

"With *THE SCORPION KING*, sometimes we used stunt people, some guys we all have, but all the close-ups, all the fights actually in the sandstorm, we did it all ourselves. There were no stunt men. We couldn't. We trained. I have had experience in fighting on screen. I did a Viking movie, *THE VIKING SAGAS*, a small movie, without a boat, just like a Western without horses [laughs]. And then I had to train for *GLADIATOR*."

Did Moeller's role in *GLADIATOR* clinch his being cast as Thorak in this film? "I met the director, Chuck Russell, on *ERASER*, when he worked with Arnold [Schwarzenegger].... Chuck, I would say, he is an active di-

JUST A COUPLA BIG TEDDY BEARS...
REALLY BIG TEDDY BEARS: Michael
Clarke Duncan (left) and Dwayne Johnson
(aka The Rock, right) josh between takes.





All Hail....

**THE
SCORPION KING**

rector, sometimes an action director, very good with action. He proved that in a couple of movies, but he is also an actor's director. You can talk to him. I have said, 'Do you think maybe we could change this word of this sentence?' As a foreigner you always have to try a little bit, try to figure out the best words that fit your mouth, and he's open to that—very helpful. I think he's a great director.

"Chuck helped me with my character of Thorak. I didn't play him like, you know, 'I'll kill you now, you will [be] punished when I kill you in the arena.' I played Thorak very soft, because he is a character who has many levels, even to Lord Memnon. Thorak knows Memnon has power, and this kind of power he respects."

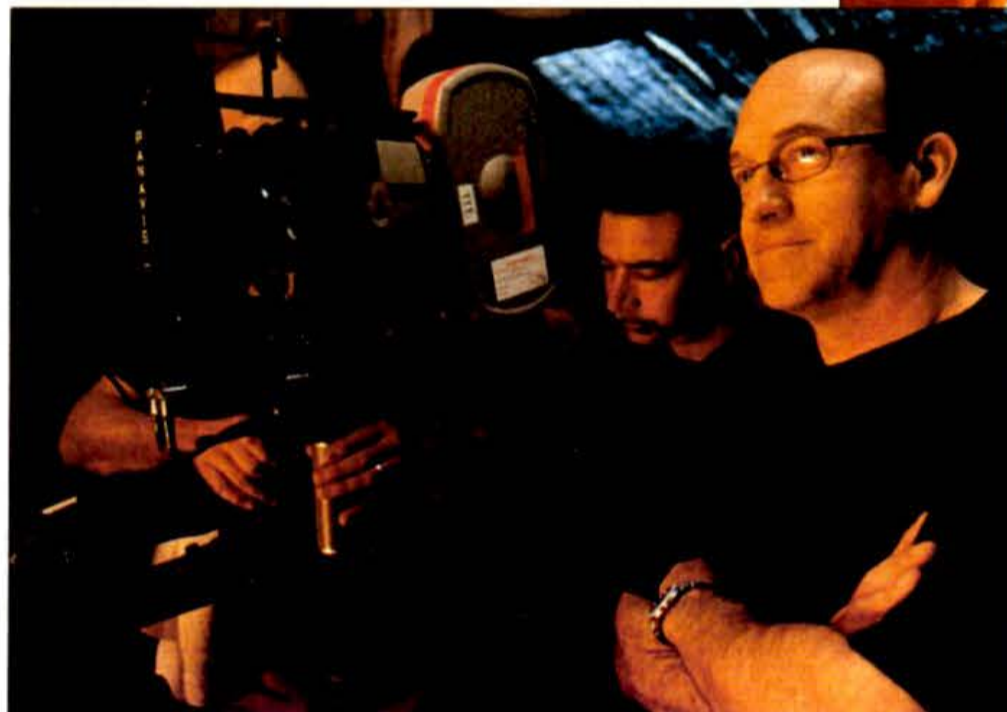
In *THE SCORPION KING* Moeller is a villain, as he was in *GLADIATOR* (albeit a soft-hearted one). It seems like he is pretty much stuck in that kind of groove. "I would love to be a leading character again. The thing is that the pressure is always there. You have to find the right thing. I mean, Arnold, when he did *CONAN THE BARBARIAN* in 1982 and *CONAN THE DESTROYER* in 1984, he was already here for twelve years. I've been here since 1982. He was eighteen when he came over; I was twenty-eight."

Moeller has often been compared to Schwarzenegger, and sometimes is looked upon as his successor. "The thing is, you need your time. Sometimes I watch movies, and I see Brad Pitt, or Tom Cruise, or Sean Penn, who were thirteen, fourteen, when they started all these kinds of films, and they are now in their mid-thirties or forties. They've been in this business for twenty years and more. I came actually to this country without speaking English at all. All I knew was because of the size, the accent, and certain things, I had to find my vehicle. And it took some time. It doesn't make any sense if I'm the lead in a Viking movie; no one is going to be seeing that beside the video audience, which is fine, but I'd rather do a big piece of film like *GLADIATOR* or *THE SCORPION KING* now. That would bring more out than doing smaller films.

Beautiful Sherri Howard sat at a table on a soundstage at Universal Studios. She was bubbling with enthusiasm about playing the part of Queen Isis in Universal's blockbuster prequel to *THE MUMMY* and *THE MUMMY RETURNS*, *THE SCORPION KING*. Behind her, a giant of a man dressed in full, early Middle-Eastern battle raiment (tight leather pants and a leather jerkin which exposed his considerably muscular chest) was quietly—astoundingly quietly—approaching her. The man was Dwayne Johnson, otherwise known as World

Wrestling Federation champion, The Rock. Howard was totally unaware of Johnson as she animatedly talked on about the friendly environment on the set of *THE SCORPION KING*. Johnson came closer, silent as a panther, until he stood directly behind Howard's chair. By the impish look on Johnson's face, it seemed as if he was about to do something to Howard which would shock the living daylights out of her. Instead, he very tenderly placed his enormous hands on the back of her chair. Feeling his presence, Howard turned around and grinned. "I guess it's time for your interview, isn't it?" she asked. Johnson nodded amicably. With a smile that could light up the inside of Carlsbad Caverns, Howard excused herself and sashayed off.

Johnson eased his six-foot, five-inch frame into Howard's place. He was as regal a figure as the titular role he enacts in his new film. *THE SCORPION KING* covers roughly the same time period as the opening scenes of *THE MUMMY RETURNS*: the dawn of Middle-Eastern civilization. Johnson plays a desert chieftain named



Mathayus, the leader of a small but fierce band of desert warriors known as the Akkadians. To most of the world, Mathayus is revered as a brave soldier, almost a god. To others, he is as feared as that most vicious of the desert dwellers, the scorpion. From the dreaded arachnid comes Mathayus's more notorious name: the Scorpion King.

Into the Scorpion King's world appears an evil warlord, Memnon (Steven Brand), who is after absolute power and is wiping out any and all tribes that stand in his way. Mathayus is summoned by Memnon's sworn enemies, tribal kings Takmet (Peter Facinelli) and Balthazar (Michael Clarke Duncan), to lead the Akkadians on an assault. Mathayus must also assassinate Memnon's powerful, spiritual advisor, a sorceress named Cassandra (Kelly Hu), who seems to wield an almost supernatural hold over the man.

THE SCORPION KING was written by Jonathan Hales (*STAR WARS EPISODE II*), directed by Chuck Russell (*ERASER*, *THE*



MASK, *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET: DREAM WARRIORS*), and produced by Sean Daniel, Jim Jacks, and Stephen Sommers (director of *THE MUMMY* and *THE MUMMY RETURNS*). Not surprisingly, one of the co-producers is Vince McMa-

hon, owner of The World Wrestling Federation (WWF).

"I brought Vince on board," said Johnson, whose cordial demeanor seemed a universe away from the surly pose he assumes as The Rock.

There certainly was a lot of the McMahon-type physicality evident at the beginning of *THE MUMMY RETURNS*. In the film, Johnson debuted briefly as The Scorpion King, leading his warriors on to a rousing—and presumably victorious—hand-to-hand battle. "With *THE MUMMY RETURNS*, and also now with *THE SCORPION KING*, I've done my own stunts," said Johnson. "I didn't go into these films thinking, *Well, it's important that The Rock has to do his own stunts*. I just felt it was important because today's audiences, they're so dialed in. They're so not clueless, and they're well aware of trick photography and cutaways and things like that. So it was important to me. I wouldn't put myself in jeopardy. I've had two great



NEW PRESCRIPTION FOR THIS SPECTACLE: Rumor has it that fight choreographers were called in from Hong Kong to fix *THE SCORPION KING*'s lackluster action scenes. **FAR LEFT:** Director Chuck Russell.

stunt doubles who have been fantastic, and more than willing to do the stunts, but I felt if I could do it, it was important we got a shot of me actually doing it. And I think the payoff will be tremendous when the audience watches.

"The truth is, I had been preparing for just such a physical role as Mathayus for a long, long time. I played football for The Miami Hurricanes and the Calgary Stampeders, and of course I'm still a wrestler in the WWF. So much of wrestling is physical theatricality. In wrestling, we have storylines, and there are twists and there are turns in programming that always culminate in some sort of physical activity. I use that platform. I used it in live television—nothing like live television when you're able to go out and ad-lib and listen to the crowd. Doing spots like *SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE* also really, really helped me. I'm finding that the experience in working in TV spilled over into film.

"You might call it adaptability. In wrestling, you must learn to adapt to your audience—a crowd of 25,000 in Los Angeles, California, oddly enough, is certainly different than 25,000 live in Anaheim, California. The cities are only thirty, forty miles apart, but there are different audiences. I used that to help me, help the transition. And, of course, for this film, I have a fan-

tastic acting coach, Larry Moss, and Chuck Russell's been terrific. It's been a great transition."

Perhaps, but what about the transition for the rest of world? The Rock is not as well-known in, say, Asia, as he is in the United States. "I take that as a welcome challenge. That's the great thing about WWF programming. As popular as The Rock is here in the States, he's just as popular in the U.K., and just as popular in South Africa, and a lot of other places. Unfortunately, WWF programming doesn't get to a lot of countries, but again, it's definitely a welcome challenge, and this type of venue, film, this type of platform with a major motion picture of this magnitude, will increase the fan base. I look forward to it.

"It was during the filming of my scenes at the beginning of *THE MUMMY RETURNS* that I was first approached about doing *THE SCORPION KING*. Some four months later, everything really came to fruition. The studio said, 'You know what? This is something we want to do. We like this project, and hopefully we can make a franchise out of it.'"

There are certainly all the elements of a successful franchise in this film: a charismatic hero; lots of action; some tender love scenes; even a dash of tongue-in-cheek comedy. Said Johnson, "This film has all

the ingredients of a well-balanced, fantastic movie—a cross between *THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN* and *RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK*. There's a beautiful love story, all the elements of emotion, and the comedy—we felt that the film needed levity. There are several scenes that I play with a sort of mad scientist type named Philos [Bernard Hill] which are played strictly for laughs.

"This is a great opportunity for me to hit on emotions that I wouldn't necessarily hit on in WWF programming. There are the laughs, but there is also high drama: My brother is killed, and I fall in love with Cassandra, who I am supposed to assassinate. I mean, I would not have the chance to convey these emotions any other way, except in the film industry."

Although sometimes Johnson was actually honing his emoting skills while reacting to a CG effect, another component not normally found in the wrestling ring. "There are some special effects here," Johnson said, "but not to the extent that were in, say, *THE MUMMY RETURNS*. No, not at all. Everything that happens in this film could actually happen. Hand-to-hand combat can actually happen. And that's fantastic. Very proud of that.

"The training for hand-to-hand was pretty exacting. I would do WWF shows on Mondays and Tuesdays, fly to location in Africa that night, be up early morning on Wednesday, and train Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. I would do sword fighting and camel riding. Mathayus always rides into battle on this albino camel.

"I didn't want to leave any rock unturned, no pun intended. As with everything I do, I wanted to make sure that I was completely prepared. For anything, I was going to be completely prepared, as much as I could possibly do to prepare myself for the role.

"There is a certain amount of historical fact in *THE SCORPION KING*, and I wanted to be involved in that, as well. When we were in Egypt, I was absolutely fascinated by the Pyramids—all that history. That absorption of culture comes naturally to me, because my parents are very culture-oriented. My dad [former wrestling champ Rocky Johnson] is black, my mother's Samoan. Very proud. Very proud of being half-and-half. Probably because I was raised in Hawaii, I was a little bit closer to Samoan culture. It certainly had an affect, being half Samoan, half black.

"That's been the great thing, I think, in the film industry, in the WWF industry as well. Nobody really looks at me or The Rock and says, 'Oh, that's the guy who's Samoan, or he's black, or he's Greek, or Italian.' It's 'Hey, there's The Rock. There's The Scorpion King.'"

CFQ

THE SCORPION KING

Sherri Howard

An Olympic Star Tests Her Mettle as the Spirited Queen Isis

By Mitch Persons

The bane of a film journalist's life is an interviewee who simply "ain't a-talkin'." That is definitely *not* the situation with knock-down gorgeous Sherri Howard, the actress who plays the part of Queen Isis in Universal's latest blockbuster, *THE SCORPION KING*. A reporter's dream, the

bubbly Howard lets it all flow out—usually at a rapid-fire, barely-pausing-for-a-breath rate.

Sports fans know Howard as the winner of both gold and silver medals for the 400-meter relay race in the 1984 and 1988 Olympics. When she is asked about her Olympic experiences, she gushed, "You want to know about my Olympic experiences?

Being in the Olympics is almost similar to being an actress. You're constantly entertaining people on a worldwide basis, for the most part, and I enjoyed doing that.

"I often told my father I enjoy being in front of the cameras, no matter in what capacity I was in front of them. For some odd reason I was very comfortable there. Being the kind of

runner that I was, my three sisters and I kind of made history in the beginning as the first family of track—the Howard-to-Howard-to-Howard-to-Howard relay team. During the course of running as the first family of track, we set seven national records in a three-week period in our high school days.... My younger sister and I made our first Olympic team as

LIFE BEFORE NIKES: Olympic star Sherri Howard (left) quickly established a professional rapport with Michael Clarke Duncan (right) on the set of *THE SCORPION KING*.



number one and number three. I was first, she was third, and we went on to win gold medals and silver medals.

"From there, just with that kind of energy and inspiration, I thought, *God, I can do a lot of stuff*. I said to my dad, 'I want to act, Daddy, I want to act!' He's like, 'Well, you know you have to do your homework.' He was always telling me to do my homework first. So I studied what it was like to be a commercial actress, then a film actress, and then I set after it. I started out with commercials, did a ton of those, especially for the Olympics. Then I turned around and I went on and pursued dancing, because I love dancing. Then I got into motivational speaking, and worked a lot with the Special Olympics, a lot with kids' programming.

"I jumped into television, and God, for one year I landed so many co-starring roles with *DIAGNOSIS MURDER*, *MARTIAL LAW*, *X-FILES*, *BEVERLY HILLS 90210*. Then I thought, *I'm ready for the big screen*. After four auditions, I landed this first big one, which was *THE SCORPION KING*. And that's how I came to play Queen Isis."

Who is Queen Isis? "She is a good person. She's a very powerful woman, in a sense. She's like an action figure kind of girl. She's the kind of person that brings peace between two big warriors, Mathayus [Dwayne Johnson, AKA The Rock,] and Balthazar [Michael Clarke Duncan]. Without Isis and her tribe, the two men cannot get into a village to beat the bad guy, who is Memnon [Steven Brand]. And so Balthazar and Mathayus need her, but they want to make sure she's tough enough, because they are so big, and Isis's tribe is so little—although with a lot of force. She stands her ground with them, and she's a very strong, powerful individual.

"True to my Olympic training, I had no stunt double. Chuck Russell asked me if I could ride a horse, because the first thing was dealing with horses, and I told him, 'Well, yeah, I can ride a horse.' Chuck kept saying, 'Some of these models, they say that, and they get on the back of a horse and

they fall off.' I'm like, 'No, I'm not a model first. I'm an athlete.' After the first day he realized, 'Oh yeah, she can ride.' So from that day I did all my scenes, and I had no body doubles.

"I did have to do some form of training for my fight scenes. They had to choreograph a lot of the stuff that we did, and we had to show Chuck what the trainers taught us. If he didn't like it, you had to be quick on your feet and learn a new routine right then and there—within ten minutes' time—so we could shoot the scene. Fortunately enough, because I always did my homework, I was very adaptable, and so whatever I was told to do, I was able to do it."

That adaptability must have impressed someone. There are rumors that Isis is going to be returning for a sequel. "She will be back," Howard said. "She does a lot of damage to Memnon's army, a force called the Red Turbans. Isis leads her tribe, and she makes sure they watch their backs in the process. Yes, she will be back."

Howard appears to be as tough as the character she plays. "Nothing really shocks me, because I have seen some stuff just with track and field alone, and all the other avenues that I've had. What actually shocked me the most was when I was ready for a fight scene, and Chuck said, 'I don't like that. You have to change it.' In ten minutes there was a whole new fight, and that really was a shock. I kept saying, 'Does this look good on camera?'"

"Just responding on my feet like that has been a great asset. So whatever Chuck came with, I would kind of look at like 'The whole routine is changed? Ten minutes we've got?' But it was good. The stunt coordinators were very good at getting new movements going, and showing you new routines."

What was it like working with The Rock and Michael Clarke Duncan? "A lot of my scenes are more with Michael than with The Rock.... Michael was a lot of fun to work with. I thank God for the athletic back-



CAN YOU SMELL WHAT THE CAMEL IS COOKING? (HOPE NOT): The Rock couldn't resist teasing Howard about her attempts to sound authoritative.

ground we both have, because that was the common ground we could share. Talking to him, it was almost like we were the same person. He is full of a lot of love, very gentle, but very outgoing, and a practical joker sometimes.

"Balthazar and Queen Isis, they have this chemistry-like thing going, and he's always posing a challenge to her. In one of the scenes that we have, he says, 'Oh, do you think you can handle this?' I have to show him a thing or two to let him know yes, we can do it, so get going. We always have this thing where she seems like she's the only one that can respond to him, and vice-versa—everybody else is null and void. When [Balthazar] and The Rock's character, Mathayus, clash, she's the one to step in and say, 'Hey, look, this is how it's gonna be. This is what it's supposed to be.' She has to make Balthazar recall what the decision-making process was.

"[Duncan] once made a bet with me when we were doing a couple of the fight scenes. He said, 'I bet you can't do this in three takes or less.' I did a lot of my scenes where it was always three takes or less, so I said, 'Okay, bring it on.' We made our little wagers, and it took four takes. I kept saying, 'Wait a minute! He changed the camera. He went into a close-up instead of the fight.' And Michael kept saying, 'No, four takes. No, four takes. You lost this time.' He and I were laughing at that—I'm like, 'Okay, we'll stop counting, but who's up on who?' And we would just keep

laughing because our bets would always be about takes and stuff like that. We had some fun times together."

Were there any of those "fun times" with The Rock? "Sure. In the process of me doing a line with Michael, I had to sound like this very demanding, very attention-getting queen that had to yell across this quad to get his attention; I had to really be firm with the way I said his name. [But] from that day, The Rock would keep saying [weak, little-girl voice], 'Balthazar, Balthazar.' I would get sort of phony upset, and told The Rock, 'I didn't say it like a girl,' and he went, 'No you were really firm, but it was just the way you did it. You went [little girl voice again], Balthazar! Don't even go there.' Every time I would do something, The Rock was like, [same tiny voice] 'Balthazar!'"

It sounded like a fun place to work. "It was, it was. Michael and The Rock even challenged me to races. I told them they didn't want to do that. They kept saying, 'Put on the right shoes. We can take that challenge.' We had a lot of fun: 'Slap me twenty and start after you hear the word go. Let me start before you.'

"Being on *THE SCORPION KING* was like a family environment. I enjoyed that, because that's how I was raised, being in a family environment. You get used to working with the people you're with, so it's like coming to work with friends. That's how the entire set, cast, and crew was. Coming to work with friends." **CFQ**

Mark Pellington Divines...

THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES

The Director Didn't Want to Build the Typical Scare-Factory

By Chuck Wagner

Before THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES, director Mark Pellington made ARLINGTON ROAD, a film about your average, everyday, terrorist-next-door. Now Pellington has jumped into another area of debate: UFOs; winged visitors; human epiphanies and tragedy—all encompassed within the running time of THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES, based on a book by John Keel. "When I was finishing ARLINGTON ROAD, Lakeshore gave me the script for THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES," Pellington recalled. "Richard Hatem was the credited writer. I read it while I was mixing ARLINGTON ROAD. I liked it, but I didn't want to commit to another movie right then.

"They came to me about a year later, and I read it [again]. There was another writer on it, and it was really different. There was something wrong with it, it felt a little more overt—you were seeing the monster. It was becoming a monster movie—I passed on it. Six months later, they came back with another draft from a third writer, and I said, 'Can I have all the drafts? Everything that's been written on it?' There were like ten drafts, and I went back to Richard Hatem's original, which was the most inspired by Keel's book."

John Keel's book, *The Mothman Chronicles*, described strange events that occurred over thirty years ago in the small town of

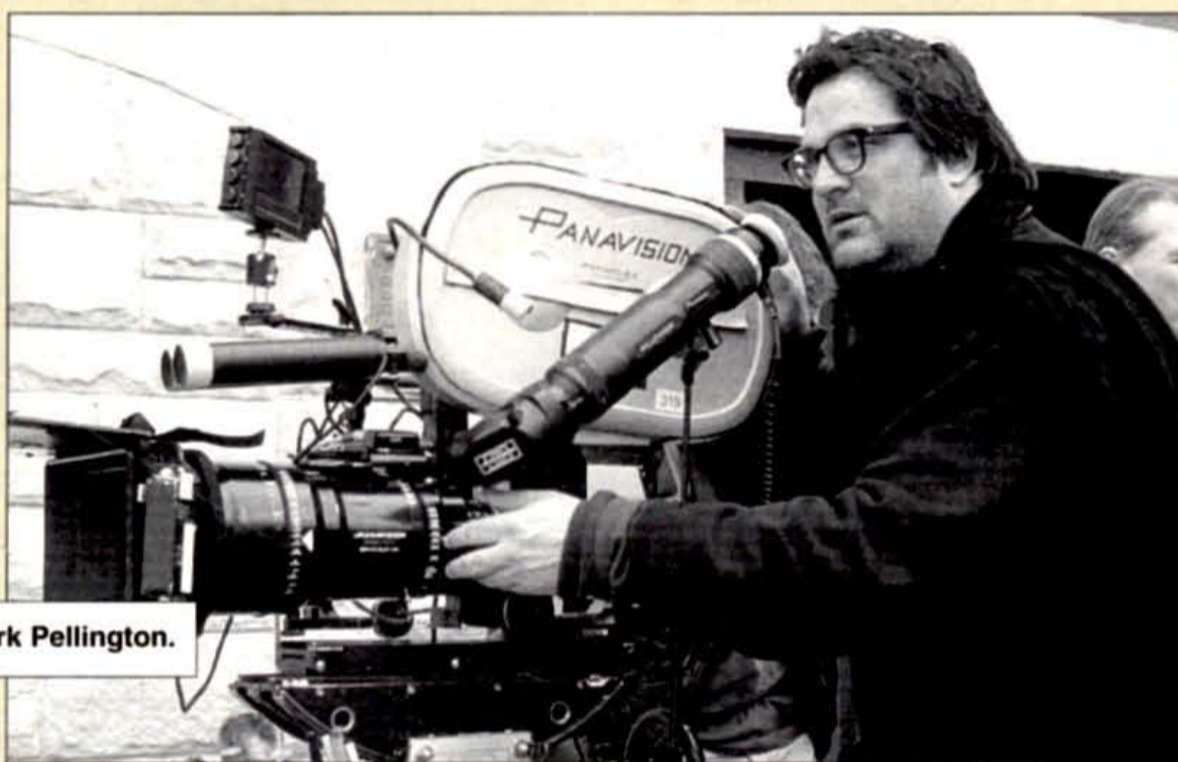
Point Pleasant, West Virginia, including sightings of a winged entity which came to be called Mothman. "There was an emotional velocity to Hatem's script. It was really weird, and I had no idea what was going on or what was going to happen next. It didn't wrap everything up or over-explain. It worked on a lot of different levels, and I said that if I could start with that draft and

"I think that's what Richard Hatem did with Keel's book. The book is a pretty rambling, incoherent, non-fictional account of events over a thirteen-month period in Point Pleasant. Then it splinters off into offshoots of things that were happening in Europe or in all different places in 1967. But the movie's contemporary.

"What Hatem did was take events, or sometimes collages of events, and come up with an anchor character to whom these things were happening in Point Pleasant—he connected them to a frame with [this journalist] John Klein [played by Richard Gere] and his wife, Mary [Deborah Messing]. Mary sees something after a car accident in D.C. and draws these fucked-up pictures. Then John Klein inexplicably ends up in Point Pleasant, six hundred miles out of his way, and has no idea how he got there. The police sergeant, Connie Parker [Laura Linney] says weird

stuff has been happening, and shows him a drawing that's identical to what his wife drew. Then Klein starts to notice other things, like a Y-shaped scorch on a tree that's similar to a scorch that was on a bumper.

"He starts...not so much an investigation—I didn't want to make it, *Oooh!* A reporter's investigating this stuff. He's emotionally and personally drawn to it; it's about his wife. His wife dies of a tumor, and the tumor was discovered after she had this experience with this entity on the street...



Director Mark Pellington.

rewrite it with two friends of mine—we'd cut and paste a couple of things from the other drafts—and come up with my shooting script, that would be the version that I'd want to make.

"We tried to take it away from being a creature movie, because that's not really my strength. I wanted to make a movie about perception and fear and subjectivity. What if the Mothman sightings or the lights in the sky were all these hallucinatory, subjective responses that individuals were having, rather than one creature?"

Ultimately, he gets drawn in.

"Ultimately Klein gets closer and closer until suddenly, at about fifty minutes into the movie, he has a phone conversation with this entity called Ingrid Cold, who seems to know everything about him and can read his mind. Then it becomes his journey to figure out why he's there and what his wife has to do with it. He goes to seek the guidance of Alan Bates, who plays a character named Leek [book author Keel spelled backwards]. Leek wrote a book that Klein reads in Point Pleasant, called *The Visible Dark: a Rationale for Unexplained Phenomenon*. It's the first place that Klein goes outside of Point Pleasant to try and find out what's going on.

"Leek gives the audience the overall historical, mythological, scientific—or non-scientific—reasoning behind what these things are. He explains to Klein that he's looking for a rational explanation of the irrational, that these things have been around forever. 'Do you believe in an energy like lightning, before lightning strikes?' Leek asks. 'Is it about foreshadowing or precognition?' All these things are thrown into the stew without [the film] becoming, necessarily, a primer on these things. It becomes more the texture of the world, where one character goes through the psychological suspense. Every prophecy is seen off-camera, or revealed through television or newspaper, all leading to Richard's misguided attempt to figure out what the next prophecy is."

Things do get outright dangerous. "There's a bridge collapse in the movie," Pellington explained, "which is based on the collapse of the Silver Bridge in '67, which killed forty-eight people. After that, the locals stopped seeing the Mothman in Point Pleasant. Other sightings continued around the world, but Mothman was never seen in Point Pleasant again."

Of course, any director might have trouble embracing a concept like Mothman. "The drafts that were coming in were kind of like this big winged creature howling. I said, 'Look, I'm interested in doing something like *CURSE OF THE DEMON*.' I'd heard that Jacques Tourneur would make these movies where you never saw anything, and then the studio would take it away from him and put in these really cheesy monsters. The ultimate goal is that if we never see the Mothman, then that's our success."

What about that segment of the viewing public who won't be satisfied unless they see that howling Mothman? "I know that people are into it," Pellington said, "but *why* are they into it? Almost at a theological or spiritual level, why are people always fascinated with these things? There's no documented proof, there's no real physical evidence. Why do they continue to haunt us?"

"Without getting too heavy about it,



SEEING THINGS? Journalist Richard Gere and police officer Laura Linney (in reflection) join forces to explore unexplained phenomena in *THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES*.

it's about what is out there, what is the unknown, what do you see or not see—is it individual perception?—I thematically put all that stuff into a pile and I say, 'That's what's interesting to me. How can I weave it into the story?'

"I went to Point Pleasant, a really sleepy, kind of sad, small town, but it really had a charm. It inspired me. We were looking for towns in Pittsburgh. We needed a town with a bridge next to it, and Pittsburgh was obvious because it had the terrain of West Virginia and it had towns. Do you want a spooky town, a sleepy town, a town with this kind of bridge? It was like ducks in a pond. I spent a day in Point Pleasant and it helped me make my choice about the town we looked for in Pittsburgh.

"One of the reasons I picked Pittsburgh was because I'd read in the book that these entities are attracted to junkyards, construction sites, abandoned buildings, stuff like that. South of Pittsburgh, that's all you get. Driving by these sites, you'd feel it: You'd be looking and...wait! Was that something there? Diving into that material, your mind begins to manifest itself, catching glimpses of things outside your window or seeing weird shapes. I think it served to heighten everyone's perceptual senses. That was a good energy to have."

What will the audience see in the film? "The audience will see very brief, yet very specifically different interpretations based on where the character is. There's an iconography that's similar: a Y-shape that—from lights on water, to a scorch on a tree, to a drawing, to a subjective hallucination—is similar. There's a continuity of color—with red and the suggestion of red eyes—that plays itself into the design of the movie, even in everyday scenes."

Though the movie is based on accounts

that's what I'm interested in. If

of real events, the movie is a fictionalized story set in the present day, with Mothman a new phenomenon. "Then you have the character of Ingrid Cold, which makes an appearance to the audience as a silhouetted figure with a lowered left shoulder that comes toward you. But are those wings that come out of his back at the beginning, or not? Is Cold the same as Mothman?"

Gere's character played well against the local police sergeant played by Laura Linney. Having previously worked with Gere in *PRIMAL FEAR*, Pellington tried to avoid stereotypes like stock romance or assertions of madness. "They had a great comfort level together," Pellington said. "They're like partners, but she doesn't become the stock skeptic, saying things like 'John, you're mad!' I actually made that mistake in *ARLINGTON ROAD*. On this movie, I didn't want to do that."

But *THE MOTHMAN PROPHECIES* isn't all bridge collapses. Little things happen which build the fear and paranoia. "This movie will do for phones what *PSYCHO* did for showers," Pellington promised. "There was a weird energy on this movie. Lights would blow out inexplicably; lights would go on fire. You'd have a set lit, and the whole thing would just disrupt. Way, way more electrical problems on this movie than anything else."

Not that any of the weird goings-on dissuaded Richard Gere. "He *got* the movie. He got it in our first meeting. I had written this hundred-page manifesto, this brain-spew about how I saw the movie, and I had a CD that our music supervisor had put together. I told Gere, 'This is what the movie sounds like; this is what it's going to feel like; here's a bunch of images,' and I gave it to him. He came back the next day and said, 'Man, you motherfucker, I don't know where you're going, but I'm with you!' I appreciated that."

CFQ

By Edward Gross

"The first Blade was balls to the wall, this one crushes them."

Such is the not-so-subtle proclamation of Guillermo del Toro, director of *BLADE 2: BLOODHUNT*. If buzz has any validity to it, this sequel to Steve Norrington's 1998 original—which also starred Wesley Snipes—will not only inflict the aforementioned physical damage, but may well launch the Blade character into franchise territory.

The idea that there is a Blade sequel to discuss, let alone talk of future entries, is pretty amazing. In truth, when the first film was released, no one really knew what to expect. After all, the character was viewed by those who remembered it as little more than a supporting player in Marvel's long-running *Tomb of Dracula* series. The notion that he could be the subject of a major motion picture was viewed as fairly laughable. Yet *BLADE* was a tremendous hit, opening the door for Fox's *X-MEN* which, in turn, paved the way for the flood of comic book movies that are currently in various stages of development.

"*X-MEN* deserves a lot of credit, but I must give just as much credit to Norrington, [screenwriter] David Goyer, and Wesley Snipes for *BLADE*," said Marvel's Avi Arad. "No

Line did a good job with it—but they didn't expect it to open at \$18 million. That's a big opening. There are some major movie stars today that cannot open like that. The success of that film gave impetus for people to look at it and say, 'That geek universe, they bought all these tickets,' and it gave confidence to Fox to go on with another comic book movie."

"*BLADE* is a comic book movie," offered David Goyer, screenwriter of both entries and a producer on *BLADE 2* as well. "But I think the vast majority of people who saw *BLADE* didn't view it as such. I remember when we screened the first film, only about ten percent of the audience was even aware that it was based on a comic book character. I think that from Marvel and DC there are a handful of characters that the public is aware of—top-tier characters like Spider-Man, the Hulk, Captain America, Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman. After that, I don't think the audience has any kind of particular awareness."

For this reason, Goyer explained, there isn't quite as much public scrutiny on the filmmakers' approach, nor is there a need to adhere too closely to the source material. "In the first film," Goyer pointed out, "there were certain changes in the character of Blade. In the comic books,

DARK CITY, and *ZIGZAG* (2000, on which he also made his directorial debut) and the forthcoming adaptation of *GHOST RIDER*, feels that it's a mistake for filmmakers who aren't familiar with the source material to adapt a comic book into a screenplay. This, he believes, is something that has happened too often in the past. Indeed, Hollywood's box office obituary page is filled with the corpses of innumerable failed projects based on comic characters. "The difference

BLADE

one would have made a movie the size of *X-MEN* without looking at *BLADE* and saying, 'Whoa, wait a second. One hundred and fifty million box office worldwide on a character who is not totally known?' Usually in this genre, a film doesn't open that big. At the time, Marvel was in bankruptcy, so there wasn't even the word 'Marvel' on *BLADE*. It was pre-Internet, so the geeks couldn't do what we're doing now with incredible ground support and a movement to go see the movie. Aside from Michael Deluca, who is the king geek, his old company, New Line, was nervous about a movie like that.

"It wasn't a high budget, it wasn't promoted well. It was promoted okay—New

was never half-human/half-vampire.

He was human. There are plenty of other things that were changed as well.

"The basic premise I took was that Blade's mother was bitten by a vampire when she was pregnant and, because of that, he has grown up with this crusade of his. That's what I took and went from there. A project like *BLADE*, unlike a character like Spider-Man, brings with it more latitude. I think the fans can kind of smell or sense if something like *BLADE* feels authentic in its intent or its source material, which I think *BLADE* is. But I also think they can smell a phony. Remember that horrible *STEEL* movie? Or *SUPERGIRL*? They can tell."

Goyer, whose credits include *THE CROW: CITY OF ANGELS* (1996),

between something like *THE X-MEN* movie, *BLADE*, or *SPIDER-MAN* is that all of us that are adapting them to a certain extent clearly were weaned on the material," he said. "Aside from the fact that there are a lot of fans that might be angry, there were things a lot of those comic books were doing that were well-informed. There's a reason why the characters grew so popular and resonate, and it's not just because they were so well drawn. There are a lot of things to be learned from the past failures."

To drive home his point, Goyer brings up the script for *DR. STRANGE* he wrote for Columbia Pictures; a project that has since gone into turnaround and may be resurrected at Dimension Films (though the writer's involvement hasn't yet been determined). The experience delineated the difference between a nurturing, creative atmosphere such as he felt on the *BLADE*



BLADE 2

The Vampire Hunter Who Initiated Marvel's Cinematic Recovery Returns

films at New Line, and the non-informed attitude that governs many of the other studios. "At the time," Goyer explained, "THE CROW had come out and the BATMAN movies were successful. People were scrambling to get comic properties. Fox had just secured the rights to the Fantastic Four and the X-Men, and Columbia really wanted to get one of the top-tier Marvel Comics characters, because they were so hot. One of the big ones left was Dr. Strange. So they made a deal to do Dr. Strange, but they didn't particularly love the character. The executives and the head of Columbia had never read a Dr. Strange comic book. All they knew was that he was one of the big Marvel Comics characters. It's like a ridiculous way to go into adapting.

"So I did this script. I owned all of the Dr. Strange comics and *Strange Tales* comics—I didn't buy them before adapting them, I had owned them from

when I was a kid. I did a draft and it was well-received, but I remember I had gotten this comment from this one executive at Columbia, who said, 'I really love this script, I just wish there wasn't any magic in it.' I just about committed *hara-kiri*, because that was a perfect example of everything that's wrong with this business."

New Line, conversely, seems to have the right creative approach, at least as far as Goyer is concerned. In fact, it's the writer's

opinion that New Line is more supportive of its filmmakers than most of the other studios he's dealt with, a point emphasized by the freedom allowed on BLADE 2. "We were successful the first time and we're largely the same team, so there's no reason to assume that we didn't know what we were doing," he said. "But it was more interesting to note that at the preview screening [of the first film] and the meetings after the private

screening, there were only a handful of people from New Line there, as well as myself and Steve Norrington and [producer] Peter Frankfurt. On the meetings for BLADE 2, now that they smelled big bucks



NEW MENACE MASTER: Guillermo del Toro (seen here with Wesley Snipes) wanted *BLADE 2*'s tone to be darker than that of its sleeper hit predecessor, *BLADE*.

wrote the sequel, he sent me the idea and said, 'What about you doing this one?'

"At first I didn't like the idea of doing a sequel to anything, because I like to create my own stuff and, if possible, write it. But I gave him some of my reaction to the material, some of my notes and so forth. I told him, 'These are things I would do different.'"

Goyer came back to him with a rewrite that addressed some of the issues that the filmmaker had raised. "The whole time," del Toro explained, "I was always intrigued by the premise of the whole thing, which was that there is a new race of vampires that feed on humans *and* vampires. The very phrase

'a new race of vampires' was, visually, irresistible to me. I needed to create these. I said to him, 'I still think I would do this and that, and maybe this is not where you want to take this material...'

And a third time he came back with the screenplay with *those* changes. David and Frankfurt, the producer, really wanted me to do the film. I finally read it, and I said, 'Look, I think that my vi-

and the stakes are higher, there was something like twenty-seven people there. It's very funny to see that develop."

Once New Line offered support for the new film, Goyer set about developing a story that would take the character in directions that would distinguish this entry from its predecessor. "We weren't hampered by an origin story," he said. "We didn't necessarily feel the need to explain or re-explain the vampire mythology. We weren't hampered with the need to explain which elements of the vampire mythology still held true and which didn't. All of that backstory and all of that grist that you have to go through on the first film was not something we had to deal with. That really sort of liberated us and we were able to literally hit the ground running on the second film. In fact, we just sort of went on the assumption that the vast majority of people seeing the movie would have seen the first one. We really didn't stop and explain everything.

"The movie literally begins in the middle of another story, like a James Bond opening. In one of our conversations, we said, 'You know, when you see a James Bond movie, they don't explain who Miss Money Penny or M is every single time. You just have to pick it up as you're going along.

"I approached it from the perspective of what a fan would want to see. And I sat down and looked at what were effective sequels—*ALIENS* and *T2* come to mind—and sequels that failed, and there were a whole lot of those. Given that we had Wesley again and the same guy was writing it and I'm producing this one as well, and Peter Frankfurt—the producer of the first one—was back, I felt reasonably confident that between all of us we could make a good film, and I think we did."

His confidence actually multiplied when Guillermo del Toro entered the mix. Having

established himself on such low-budget efforts as *CRONOS* (1993) and *THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE* (2001), and higher-budget fare like *MIMIC* (1997) and the forthcoming *HELLBOY* (scheduled for 2003), the director was considered a major coup for the production. "In the first film we did not go with the obvious choice, either," said Goyer. "Steve Norrington had made one very small film that very few people had seen, but we liked the fact that he had this kind of insane, crazed energy, and that he was coming out of left field and wasn't the usual choice. I think that, because of that, he kind of elevated what in a way was a glorified B-movie, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. With Guillermo, we wanted to go in the same direction. We wanted to pick somebody who would be unusual and exciting. Guillermo had made *CHRONOS*, which I thought was fantastic, and the much-maligned *MIMIC*, the first half of which I really liked. I've been friends with Guillermo for a long time and I was well aware of the trauma of making *MIMIC*—it was a really screwed up process. After *DEVIL'S BACKBONE*, somehow Guillermo was viewed almost like an art house director, so we knew that he would bring a sensibility to it that would take the normal genre film and turn it on its side a little, which is what we wanted. And he's done that."

Friendships notwithstanding, del Toro's services were not easy to secure, as he wasn't sure himself whether or not he wanted to be involved in the second *BLADE* film. Said the director, "I told David how much I liked both *DARK CITY* and the first *BLADE*, which I really enjoyed the hell out of. I thought it was a fun movie—very innovative in some aspects, and it brought the whole vampire mythology to the urban environment, and so forth. Then when he



sual take on the movie would be very different from the visuals of the first one, although I would preserve some of the style to maintain continuity. But if you want me to pitch it to New Line and Wesley Snipes, I will.' One of the things that I pitched was that this should be more scary, but equally fun to the first one; it should be a nonstop adventure."

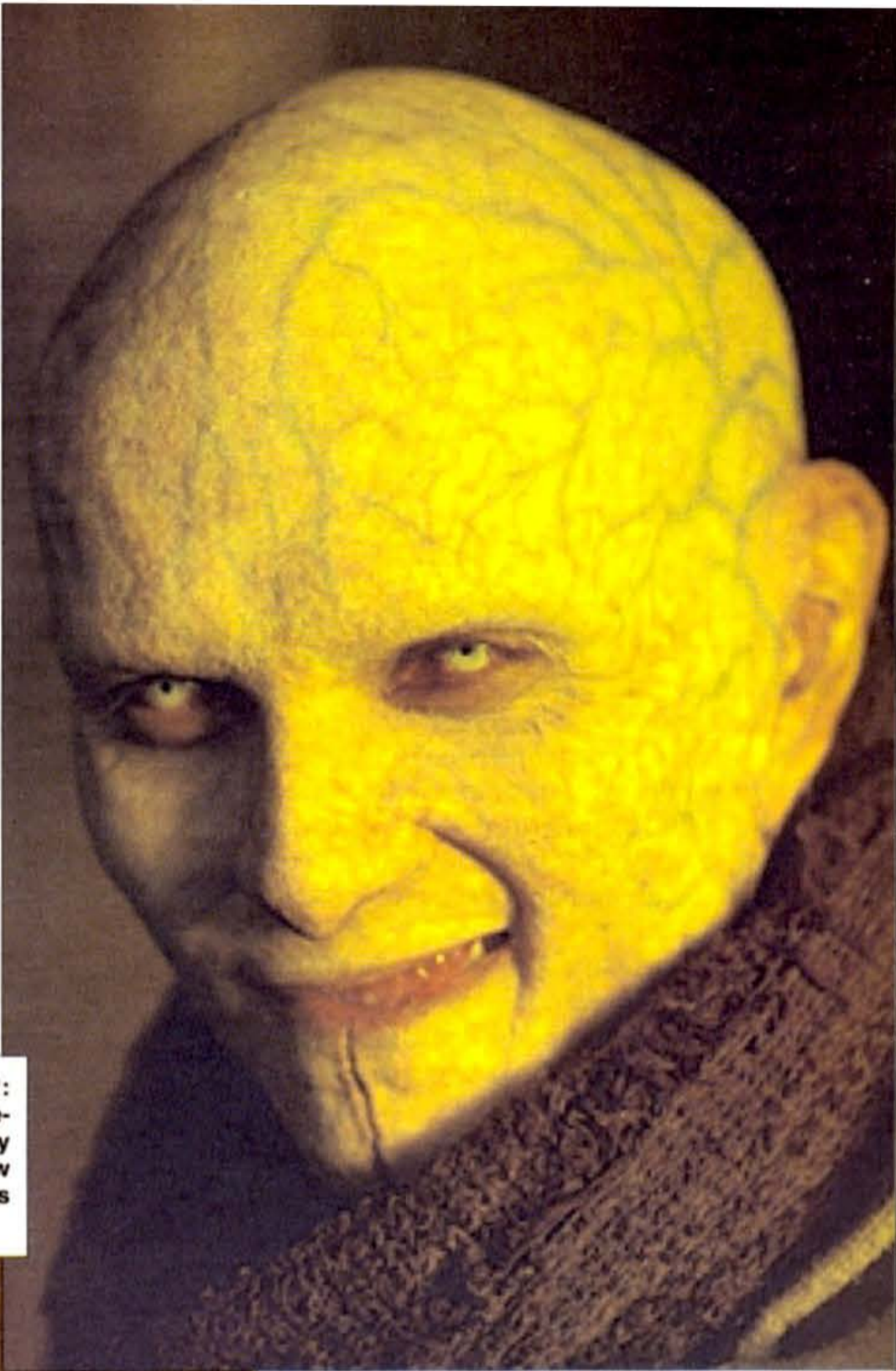
"And it is," interjected Goyer. "Guillermo also loves the genre. He's as well versed in comic books and horror movies and science fiction movies as I am, maybe even more so in terms of the movie area. What was fun is that he and I speak each other's language. We could say, 'Oh, remember that cool scene in *THE DIRTY DOZEN*, or this scene or that one? Or the cool scene in the *HELLBLAZER* comic?' We had the same points of reference. I remember walking on the set of Prague one time and I hadn't previously seen this one set. I immediately turned to him and said, 'That's out of the *Gadgets* CD-ROM,' and he kind of winked and said, 'Yes, but you and I are the only ones who will even know.'

"I had that with Steve Norrington as well. At one point, Norrington and I were discussing a sequence in the film, and it was a sequence in the first film where Blade

gets strapped into this stone chamber and they start bleeding him. We started talking with the production designers and we said, 'It should be like one of those big, crazy Jack Kirby devices.' The guy didn't know what we were talking about, but we did."

One of the things that del Toro wanted to accomplish with the film was to transfer the action, figuratively speaking, to another realm that was more comic book and considerably more exotic, which is something he feels the first one accomplished by setting itself in an urban environment. Beyond that, it was his visualization of the Reapers that drew him in the most. Indeed, the concept of the Reapers is the element of *BLADE 2* that

A STRAINED RELATIONSHIP: Equipped with the latest in vampire-snuffing technology, Blade (Wesley Snipes, below) must battle a new form of virus-bred bloodsuckers (such as Luke Goss, right).



seemed to intrigue everyone, who was fascinated by the notion of a new breed of vampire that feeds on your standard run-of-the-mill bloodsuckers.

Offered Goyer, "In the first film we established that vampirism is a progressive virus, and viruses mutate. So it's a new strain of a vampire virus—a mutant, a new kind of vampire emerges that preys not just on humans, but on vampires as well. So it poses a threat to both the human and vampire populations. It's a more immediate threat, which is why Blade and the vampires team up. It's basically modeled after *THE DIRTY DOZEN*. Guillermo and I love that film. It's Lee Marvin with a bunch of criminals who would love nothing more than to kill him, and that's the set up. Blade is forced to run around with these vampires that have a blood pact and have been training for the past two years to hunt and kill him. He knows that when it's all over, he's going to have to kill them or vice versa. So it's a hard won truce for the purpose of the film."

For his part, del Toro had his own goal in mind with the Reapers. "I am fed up with vampires being tortured

Victorian heroes," he said matter-of-factly. "I just don't like the whole concept. I think vampirism is essentially sucking someone else's blood, which can be dealt with as an addiction or in so many other ways which are interesting. I just want vampires to be scary again—the concept of being drained of your blood by something—as opposed to a romantic interlude. With that Victorian era, where the Westernization of the vampire myth occurs in the nineteenth century, the scariest part of this was that they would rob you of your life and turn you into something not human. It was a very fine line trying to make the main Reaper a sympathetic and tragic character, but still biologically a new kind of thing that would be hungry for blood and would be a scary thing to face. I think that most people imagine vampires in a romantic way, and most women fantasize about being drained by Angel or Tom Cruise or Brad Pitt, but nobody is going to fantasize about being drained by these creatures.

"I just wanted to get away from that, even on the biological point of view. Getting away from the bite just being a bite of two little fangs. This was something that comes to us since Bela Lugosi, and I think the first one dealt with it in a much more brutal way, which I felt was biting off a piece of flesh and drinking. But these guys are not messy, they're very efficient. They're as efficient as a leech. I am fascinated by the several ways that you can read the same phenomenon [vampirism]. It can be a sexual, erotic thing. It can have a purely addictive element to it. There is a political element in it. There is also the more basic, more fun elements of the monster. There are so many takes you can have on that myth that are fascinating. In the case of

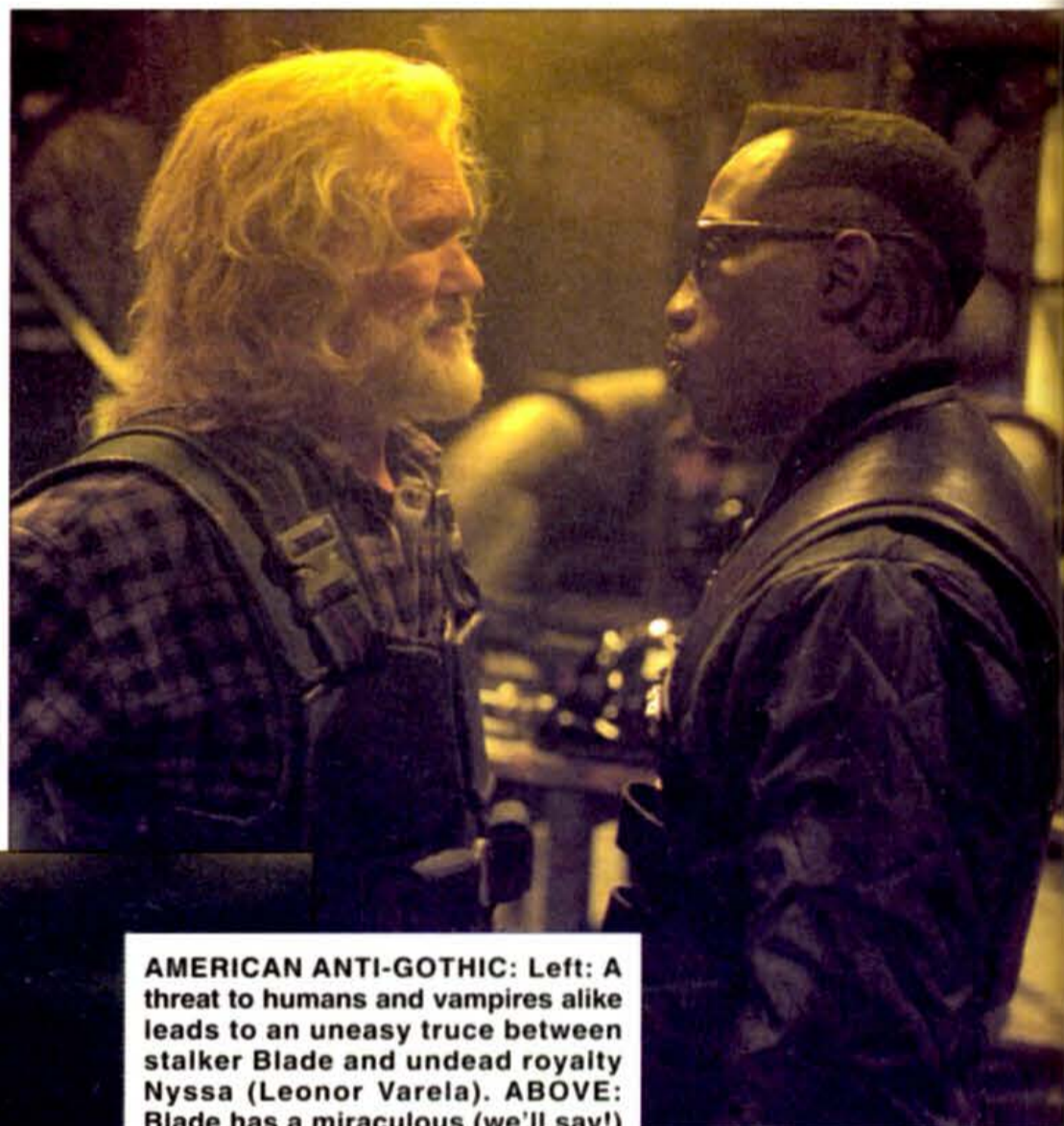
BLADE, one of the nice things was that it allowed me to make the regular vampires more human and have Blade have more of an understanding of them by creating a super vampire, so to speak. At the same time, I tried to keep that main Reaper an interesting victim of his own thirst. All of this, within its comic book parameters—this is not SENSE AND SENSIBILITY."

Evolution seems to be the key phrase bandied about when discussing BLADE 2, and it was Goyer's intention that this Blade be somewhat different from the character that audiences met four years ago. "Blade is not as buttoned down as he was in the first film," Goyer said. "Also, at the end of the first film, Blade had reached a place where he had more or less found peace within himself. There was a lot of self-loathing going on in the first film, and there isn't any of that in this film. Clearly Blade as a character is having more fun and is okay with who he is. There's a Buddhist saying, which I'm paraphrasing, which says, 'On the road to enlightenment, you have to kill your mother, kill your father, kill your teacher, or kill Buddha.' We were always joking that that's what Blade effectively did in the first film. He literally kills his mother; his father is—sort of, in effect—Deacon Frost; and his teacher, even though he's not the one who kills him, is Whistler. You can only become actualized after

you symbolically or literally do all of those things. Now that Blade has stripped himself of all that, he could come to peace with himself."

In Goyer's opinion, Blade is not as angst-ridden as he had been in the original, but the film itself is darker and more ferocious than the previous one. "This is a brutal movie, and I applaud New Line for letting us do that," he noted. "We did not want to tone things down, and it will be evident from the very beginning that we did not do that at all. It's a violent movie. It's stylized violence in that it's not really set in the real world. Obviously, being a vampire film, there's a certain amount of blood. People who were expecting us to tone things down will be surprised.

"When Peter Frankfurt and I sat down as we embarked on the film, we said, 'What didn't work in the first film? What can we



AMERICAN ANTI-GOTHIC: Left: A threat to humans and vampires alike leads to an uneasy truce between stalker Blade and undead royalty Nyssa (Leonor Varela). ABOVE: Blade has a miraculous (we'll say!) reunion with tech wiz Whistler (Kris Kristofferson).



improve on?' I think there are parts of the first film that could have been funnier. Not that we wanted it to be a comedy. I think with maybe one exception, it really wasn't scary at all. It was more of a straight action movie. We knew we could make it scarier, and there are some really scary sequences in BLADE 2. This film straddles the line between action and horror. There's more action in this film than in the last film, but there's also more suspense. It was so much fun to be doing it a second time and very surreal as well. It's strange and fun to do your own sequel, because you get to consciously sort of play with and subvert things that you

set up. Sometimes you say to yourself, 'Why did I do that in the first film?' **BLADE 2** moves more quickly than the first film. It's a rollercoaster ride...or an assault."

This particular "assault" begins with Blade having relocated to Prague, where he has hooked up with John Frohmyer (Norman Reedus), who goes by the nickname of "Scud." A bit of a druggy, this twentysomething nonetheless creates a number of new weapons for Blade to use in his battle against the vampires. Working together, the duo has taken out innumerable members of the undead. As the film opens up, it seems that Blade has gotten word that Whistler (Kris Kristofferson) is still alive, and he's been desperately searching for him. Taking out nearly an entire nest of vampires, Blade and Scud are led by one of them to the Moo-Cow Creamery Factory, where Whistler, who has been infected with the vampire virus, is submerged in a tank filled with blood. Freeing him (in an action-packed sequence), Blade injects Whistler with a retroviral detox serum, the only available treatment, and has no choice but to wait and see if it takes effect, or whether or not he'll have to kill his long-time friend. Ultimately Whistler is saved, finding himself reunited with Blade while having to cope with the presence of Scud, feeling a bit of jealousy over the younger man's friendship with Blade.

The real question these opening sequences raises, of course, is how Whistler can still be alive, considering that we pretty much saw him die in the original?

"That's what I said," laughed Kristofferson, who was seen last summer in Tim Burton's **PLANET OF THE APES**. "But I was pleased that they wanted to bring me back to life. You've got to take a big leap of faith when you're making a movie about vampires. It was as plausible to me as anything in the first one. But I don't think any of that stuff bears real close scrutiny about whether it would work. For me, I was anxious to get

of the action. I was getting beat up during those fight scenes with vampires and getting thrown around in the sewers with the pipes and all that stuff. You know, you break easier the older you get. I spent a lot of time in the hospital there. Fortunately, I was in pretty good shape."

Most interesting to the veteran actor was the choice of del Toro as director, who he felt made a real effort to acknowledge what the actors were doing, rather than focusing on the technical end of things. "He was always paying attention to the subtleties of relationships," Kristofferson said. "That was what interested me in the first film, too, the relationship between Blade and Whistler. In this one, it's between Blade and Whistler and Scud, who's a young, hip kid. I liked the competition between Whistler and Scud, and that they come out with kind of a grudging respect for each other. There's a nice bunch of sparring that goes down between them. That, I credit mostly to Guillermo, because he was aware of the possibilities between Whistler and Scud. It's almost like being jealous of who's closer to Blade and feeling replaced, and *then* finding this dope-smoking kid is using all your stuff. In action movies, it bores the shit out of me when it's more about the business instead of the characters. It's harder to find an action movie that's got real live characters in it. To me, that's what gives us a shot at making this worth doing. When you hear 'sequel,' you think, 'Well, that's gotta be worse,' but I think they were real lucky in getting the director they got."



ACTION ON DEMAND: BLADE 2 star Wesley Snipes blocks out nighttime motorcycle stunt on-location.

film]. The whole thing is: Whistler shoots himself while he's still a human, [and] when he shot himself, the bullet went through him and he became a vampire with a huge hole. In the course of the years which [form] the gap between the two movies, he healed and was kept by the vampires as bait to have Blade travel around the world. **BLADE 2** is by no stretch of the imagination a character-driven drama, but I think the interplay between the characters is really interesting."

Following the retrieval of Whistler, the trio head back to headquarters. Shortly after their arrival, they're approached by a number of vampires, who are not there to fight, but rather to deliver a message. It seems that the Vampire Overlord, Eli Damaskinos (Thomas Kretschmann), has sent along his daughter, Nyssa (Leonor Varela) and the warrior Asad (Danny John Jules) to establish a truce with Blade. Although it takes some convincing, Blade and his people go to meet with Damaskinos. Once there, they're told about the Reaper strain of the vampire virus, which results in a mutated form of vampire that is far stronger and more powerful than regular vampires. When infected by a Reaper, the victim doesn't die, but, instead, becomes a carrier.

"I'm tired of vampires being tortured, Victorian heroes. Vampirism is essentially sucking someone else's blood—I want them to be scary again."

—Director Guillermo del Toro

past it since it was so goddamned uncomfortable. They were breaking me out of this tank full of blood that the vampires have kept me in. It was snowing and so cold. This was the first scene I had in the movie: They broke me out of this thing; I was soaked; had no shirt or shoes on; and it was freezing. It was an intimation of things to come.

"It was a rough shoot; harder than the original. I was in this one more and in more

For del Toro, the relationship between Blade and Whistler was one of the most appealing aspects of the original **BLADE**, feeling that there was something of a father/son dynamic at play. Not only was it multi-racial, but it conveyed a genuine love between the two characters.

"One of the things that I liked about the **BLADE 2** script was that, at the beginning, Blade is searching for Whistler after he shot himself while he's still a human [in the first

Led by Jarek Nomak (Luke Goss), the Reapers are rapidly infiltrating humanity and are filling the streets with carriers.

Damaskinos and his advisor, Kounen (Karel Roden), ask Blade to join them in the hunt for Nomak, who is deemed the leader—or principal carrier—of the Reaper strain. To provide aid, Nomak offers Blade use of his highly trained warriors, the Bloodpack. Recognizing this as a chance to

continued on page 30

BLADE 2

This Marvel Moment

Comics Company Takes the Cinematic Lead by Keeping the Heart Beating Beneath the Spandex

By Edward Gross

These days, Avi Arad follows a simple philosophy: Let sleeping Supermen lie. However, the president of Marvel Productions does admit to being at once confused and pleased with the fact that rival Warner Bros. has been unable to move many of their adaptations of DC Comics' characters out of development Hell. "I'm nervous about them," he admitted, "because if I had their library of characters, I would have had ten movies out there. But don't say anything. Let them sleep."

At the moment, Arad seems to have nothing to fear. Despite the success of its Superman and Batman feature film franchises, the DC Universe seems to have broken off from Hollywood, and that state of affairs doesn't seem likely to change any time soon.

Marvel, on the other hand, has not only scored with the Wesley Snipes starrer *BLADE* and Bryan Singer's *X-MEN*,

but they're getting ready to challenge box office records with *BLADE 2* and Sam Raimi's take on *SPIDER-MAN*, with adaptations of *THE FANTASTIC FOUR*, *WEREWOLF BY NIGHT*, *IRON FIST*, *SUBMARINER*, *SILVER SURFER*, *TALES OF THE ZOMBIE*,

wood, DC's success with the *Man of Steel* and the *Caped Crusader* notwithstanding.

"What people don't understand," said Arad, "is that it's not like you go to a studio with a character, put it on their desk and say, 'Call me when you figure out what you're doing

gan researching the project. "He came to understand that *X-MEN* is about discrimination," he explained. "It's about pain. It's about this shitty world and the way people make themselves feel better by putting someone else down. Once he got into it, he said, 'I want to

make this movie, because there's nothing about it I'm afraid of. I'm not even afraid of the uniforms.' He wasn't afraid, because he knew that the characters were going to deliver and the uniforms were going to just be the clothes. We even had fun with it, which we knew was a risk. But \$300 million later, we were fine."

In some ways, it seems hard to believe that there was a time

when Marvel was represented on screen by the awful, live-action *SPIDER-MAN* television series of the 1970's, and such zero-budget drivel as Cannon Films' *THE PUNISHER* and *CAPTAIN AMERICA*, as well as Roger Corman's never-released *THE FANTASTIC FOUR*. Arad is philosophical about those... lesser efforts. "They did not have the know-



AUTEUR PULL: Assuring that stories will be more than conglomerations of fancy costumes and glitzy special effects, Marvel has managed to attract an eclectic mix of directors, including *BLADE 2*'s Guillermo del Toro (above), plus Bryan Singer, Sam Raimi, and Ang Lee.

LUKE CAGE, *IRON MAN*, *X-MEN 2* (a.k.a. *X2*), and Ang Lee's vi-

sion of *THE INCREDIBLE HULK* on the horizon. Just as Marvel had taken the comics mantle from DC in the 1960's, it would seem that Marvel Productions has proven itself to be the superhero leaders in Holly-

wood. "This is something we do here twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. This is our lives. We really are a bunch of geeks and, thank goodness, geeks are in. We love what we do and it shows."

In bringing up *X-MEN*, Arad points out that director Bryan Singer was much more of a science fiction fan than a comic book fan—until he be-

how, and there was no technology at the time to make them the way that they can be made today.”

The turning point, in terms of respectability, came with the one-two punch of *BLADE* and *X-MEN*. “We felt that our characters, generally speaking, carry a philosophy of sorts,” said Arad. “I don’t want to get carried away with it, but it’s true. Our characters are definitely underdogs and anti-heroes. They get hurt, they don’t have an advantage. They’re different. In order to capture that, you have to put them in situations in which you are not afraid to give them heart, tears, and soul. For example, *Wolverine* requires a different responsibility in a movie than he does

in a book. In a book, when you put a line of dialogue in someone’s mouth, you can still have this ferocious kind of guy. But in a movie, it’s a visual art in which you have to show these feelings; you have to show that commitment. And Bryan captured it. I think we always felt that if we could get the philosophy across by doing the opening of *X-MEN* in a concentration camp, it would drive the audience into the movie.”

It’s Arad’s belief that the reason there seems to be a Marvel movie in some stage of production at virtually every studio is two-fold: “First,” he noted, “Marvel probably represents the largest content library ever. Second, today’s filmmakers, writers, journalists, directors—all of these people involved in creative endeavors—were, at one time or another, exposed to comics and really grew to appreciate it as a form of art, literature, and a source of great, continuous stories. Many of these kids who grew up on it one way or the other have warm feelings about the projects. Finally, they’ve got the clout, the expertise and the technology to bring these movies to the screen. So it’s history, opportunity, and one thing that we do better than anybody: we as a production

company, as a studio, understand our material better than anybody, and we can guide the projects and find the things that are fun to do.

“Obviously when you look at the names *Spider-Man*, *X-Men*, the *Hulk*, and so on, these are



UNDEAD AND HUMAN: Never losing sight that, no matter the fantastic circumstances, stories must acknowledge both the strengths and the foibles of their characters has allowed Marvel to net hits with the original *BLADE* and *THE X-MEN*.

big names that are also the obvious ones. But, believe me, they’re not. It’s a very tough job to take all of these characters that have been around for a long time and make them work well in our world. If it doesn’t work, they’ll merely seem like fish out of water. To make the kind of movies that people want to see, that people will enjoy and the studios will be willing to invest vast amounts of money in is not as easy thing.”

One thing that should be pointed out about Avi Arad is that as he gets going, you feel like you’re in the presence of a child on Christmas morning; a child who has received every gift he’s ever wished for and simply can’t wait to tell you all about it. His enthusiasm is infectious, filling you with anticipation for each of the projects that are in development. “We’re very fortunate that we can now exploit our characters with the right talent, the right directors and writers and actors,” he enthused. “The Punisher is a character that should go into production soon. No one cares if a lousy movie was made in the past, as long as the new one is going to be great. And *this one is* going to be great. Michael France did a great job with the script and it’s

a serious, serious movie. We will start production soon on *IRON*

FIST and it’s going to star Ray Park, who’s the real deal in the martial arts universe. When Ray called us, he was so excited, because he thought the script touched on all the emotions and all the reasons that he dedicated his life to the martial arts. And when you see *SPIDER-MAN*, it’s truly amazing. It plays so much on the emotional level. Obviously there is the spectacular aspect of being *Spider-Man*—it’s what you expect in this kind of event movie—but when you watch Tobey [Maguire] and Kirsten [Dunst], you totally believe in the story. She *is* Mary Jane, he *is* Peter Parker. Because of them you go on a very interesting journey of sadness, hope, let-down, point-break, and the feeling of being so unique that you cannot let yourself truly get involved with other people. So the movie on an emotional level is as spectacular as everything else.

“Look at *DAREDEVIL*,” he continued, regarding a project starring Ben Affleck, “and how it all happened: how Matt Murdoch became blind; how his father got killed; and all the religious overtones of that. Then there’s the love-hate relationship with Electra. I’m an opera fan, because operas give you such an emotional attachment

—you’re totally vested with the stories. That’s what we do here. When we do *GHOST RIDER*, it’s not going to be about a guy who went to the circus and crashed on his motorcycle. That’s fine for the kids, but we’re going to make a film like *UNFORGIVEN*; a story that says, ‘I made a deal with the Devil, but I have to remember that in life, you have to let evil in; none of us is totally innocent.’

“Then there’s *THE INCREDIBLE HULK*, which Ang Lee is directing. I just spent two days with him touring with the military about certain aspects of this movie. It’s a genuine pleasure, because you sit with him and all we talk about are emotions. We’re not even dealing with what the Hulk looks like. It doesn’t matter. We’re dealing with the fact that here’s a kid who’s been exposed to violence and he cannot open up emotionally. The Hulk is the metaphor for the monster inside us; the Hulks that we carry within us.”

All told, it’s a pretty ambitious slate of product that will, depending on their box office success, pave the way for even more super-hero adventures on the movie screen. If Avi Arad has his way, Marvel will become synonymous with big-screen entertainment.

“Over the next twenty years, there will be nowhere to hide,” he laughed. “I won’t be around, but before I pass the baton, there’s going to be a tremendous amount of product and sequels and television shows and animation. This really is the Marvel age.”

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move deeper into the world that he wants to destroy, Blade agrees to lead the Bloodpack, consisting of Reinhardt (Ron Perlman), Chupa (Matt Schulze), Priest (Tony Curran), Snowman (Donnie Yen), Lighthammer (Daz Crawford), and Verlaine (Marit Velle Kile).

Of these characters, it's Blade and Reinhardt who spend the most time together, their hatred for each other making it obvi-

a club where "sensations are addictive and pain cuts the deepest." Once within the club, they discover that there are three Reapers amongst the crowd, sizing things up, looking for victims. A battle ensues, with Priest attacked by a Reaper and instantly transformed. Outside the club, Scud, who has been left on watch, is attacked but wards off the Reaper with his UV lights, which prove deadly. At the same time,

Blade briefly encounters Nomak, who manages to escape.

Later, the body of a Reaper is taken back to headquarters, where Whistler performs an autopsy and learns a couple of important facts: Reapers must have a constant flow of blood or else they will die, and it is this constant flow

be said for that, as the late Sam Peckinpah certainly got a fair amount of action with bullets and never needed MATRIX-like effects to pull it off. "There you go, my favorite director," said Ward, smiling. "On the visual effects aspect, that was a big part of BLADE 2: making improvements on our visual effects and using them to spice things up as opposed to being the whole scene. If we did a bullet thing that was in any way close to another movie, it was probably THREE KINGS, where you followed the bullet from impact. That's what BLADE is: impact, and that's also what we had in the first one. As long as our fight sequences and gun battles were all better, we've done our job."

For Ward, one of the most rewarding aspects of BLADE 2 was working with del Toro. In fact, it's a sentiment that seems to be shared by virtually everyone. "What I really love is that Guillermo del Toro is an excellent storyteller," Ward said. "Not only does this film have Blade first as the lone wolf, but then he teams up with the very en-



A POTENT SIX-PACK: The Bloodpack (from far left: Matt Schulze, Marit Velle Kile, Tony Curran, Daz Crawford, Ron Perlman, and Donnie Yen) lend muscle to the quest for the virulent Reapers. **RIGHT:** Guillermo del Toro comes close to Reaping what he has sown.

ous that one of them will be dead before the end of the film. "Since the movie is called BLADE and not REINHARDT, I don't have to tell you who wins," offered Ron Perlman, known to genre fans for a number of projects, most notably the TV series BEAUTY AND THE BEAST (1987-1990), ALIEN RESURRECTION (1997), and del Toro's CRONOS, and who will star as the Romulan Viceroy in this November's STAR TREK: NEMESIS. "Reinhardt is this soldier of fortune or joint chief of staff, so I'm forced to have this uneasy alliance with my sworn enemy, the vampire killer. That's the dynamic; that's who I am and the ground rules that are set up. What I liked about the character was his economy of movement. He's very slick. He's obviously a couple of centuries old, at least, so there's a worldliness about him and an efficiency and a world-view about him that is compelling to me. He was fun to play. Blade and I are sparking off each other from the get-go, but it's not a buddy film. We hate each other and it's kind of a game of on-upmanship throughout the whole film."

Added del Toro, "I think we have a very nice instrument of character in having Blade join sort of the Dirty Dozen of vampires. His hatred for that entire universe and their hatred for him is a really good engine to have in the movie. And it's a lot of fun. I wanted the movie to preserve the edge of the first one, but also to preserve the fun of the first one."

As Blade and the Bloodpack set off on their quest, they arrive at the House of Pain,

that gives them their uncanny strength. Recognizing how serious this virus is, and how quickly it can be spread, Blade comes up with a plan: He and his reluctant allies will attack the Reapers at the one time they'll be vulnerable: daylight.

In the end, BLADE 2: BLOODHUNT turned out to be a creatively fulfilling experience for all involved, due mostly to the fact that they were determined to not merely repeat the success of the first film, but also to surpass it, if possible. Said stunt coordinator Jeff Ward, who served the same function on the original and has often been Wesley Snipes's stunt double, "From my point of view, being that the first one did so well, we had to take it to another level. Guillermo wanted to see what people said on the Internet about what was wrong with the first one, so we were able to correct ourselves on this one. For me, I wanted to make sure that we weren't doing the same thing that everyone else was doing."

Most notably, Ward desperately wanted to avoid the "bullet time" syndrome that was established in THE MATRIX, and has, in his opinion, been overused. His approach was to "go backwards" and make the gun-fights real. Naturally there's something to



emies that he's hunted and they have a common enemy. Guillermo's eye, his brain, was so on this that it just scared the shit out of us on-set with some of the stuff he wanted to do with the gore. Oh, man, I really hope it passes the rating.

"In vampire movies in general you have drama—the Tom Cruise vampire—and you have the comedy vampire like LOVE AT FIRST BITE. Then you have BLADE. This is where we should be with it. What was exciting for me was that Guillermo and I were so much in sync, which is a huge plus between a coordinator and a director. I don't know if he wants to do it, but I think he should take on BLADE 3."

Ron Perlman, who had previously worked with del Toro on the director's low-budget vampire film CRONOS, sees genuine growth in the filmmaker.

"For me," explained Perlman, "the filming was a lot of fun. I find Guillermo to be

one of the most elegant, sophisticated filmmakers I've ever worked with. I mean that, and I've worked with some great filmmakers. This guy just moves the camera like he's undressing a lady. It's just a beautiful thing to watch. He classes up whatever material he's working on. I saw a lot of the cut footage as he was cutting it in Prague when we were shooting, and it's exciting. It's really cool-looking and moves really fast, like a steam engine. I think that he's taken the Blade franchise and kicked it up a notch in terms of infusing it with huge energy; a different kind of energy. Not to take anything away from the first BLADE, but this is very different."

Perlman pointed out that CRONOS had a budget of "way" under \$2 million, while BLADE 2 has a "good deal more." Yet, del Toro, in his opinion, was more than up to the challenge. "It's the difference between watching Vargas' Traveling Circus and Barnum & Bailey's Three Ring Circus," he pointed out. "Watching him work on a larger canvas was incredibly interesting to me, because he was very much at home as a big-time filmmaker. He knows how to use his time, how to use the conveniences that are afforded him by having a big machine behind him. He uses them to the best advantage. He's pretty much the same guy, but he's grown in a lot of ways. His filmmaking vocabulary has grown, his experience has grown, his ability to work with actors has grown. He is much more self-confident than I remember him being. This is a guy who, the minute we met, we became life-long friends. Whether we're working on stuff together or not, we're always spending time together. That, to me, was the star of this experience, getting a chance to watch Guillermo on a huge stage and hoping to be there for him. He's tremendously bright and very inventive. He's got filmmaking in his bones. It's not something acquired or that he learned, he just is. He's like Coppola. They're both filmmakers [and] whether you like what they're doing or not, it's like the greatest dessert you've ever seen."

The real question, of course, is how del Toro himself was able to handle the change in scope, from low-budget (MIMIC notwithstanding) to big-budget. According to the director, the only concern he had was "pacing" his stamina. Cited as a prime example: While the company was in Prague, they would shoot six days a week and on the seventh del Toro would hit the editing room. "You need to live an almost monastic life," he said of adjusting to the size of the project. "I was the only one in the entire crew who did not go to dinner, did not socialize, did not have any afterlife



SHEATHED BLADE: Snipes and stunt coordinator Jeff Ward take shelter on location (hey, them leather duds are expensive).

after the shoot. I would finish my shoot, go see dailies, do the storyboards for the next day, go to sleep, wake up, and shoot. That was my day for almost a year since prep. That was one aspect. The second one was very important. New Line was great enough to agree to let me shoot everything and not use second unit."

For a project of this size, the use of a single unit is indeed unusual, but, as far as del Toro was concerned, it was absolutely necessary in order for him to go forward. This probably had a lot to do with the fact that the aspects of MIMIC that he dislikes the most are those shot second unit.

"Using second unit is a lack of control," he explained, "but it is viewed in Hollywood as being more cost-efficient. From what I've experienced, it's far *less* cost efficient, because you end up reshooting a lot of it two or three times to get it right. So on BLADE 2, if there's an insert of a finger pressing a button, that's first unit. If there's an exterior where people are working and we're establishing, that's first unit. As a result, the movie feels more compact, and you manage to keep the same control you would have on a smaller movie. In this way, the project never gets overwhelming.

"I think the exercise is exactly the same. A set is a set is a set. It doesn't matter if you're commanding fifty or one hundred people. The only thing that it requires is more discipline and to have clearer thinking. That is, at least for me, not a problem, and I actually enjoy the big movies as much as I enjoy the smaller ones."

Del Toro obviously felt right at home with the subject matter of BLADE 2, and his enthusiasm for the project seems to have been unwavering, as was his intention to capture the David Goyer screenplay and bring it to life. "One of the things I

disciplined myself on was to follow the screenplay as written, and execute that story that we sort of put together early on. *Not* try to make it GUILLERMO DEL TORO'S BLADE," but to really make BLADE 2 as a fun ride that people who saw the first one would enjoy. I don't think this is going to be greeted as a personal statement about eternity and life-after-death as CRONOS was. This is essentially a great popcorn movie.

"On MIMIC, I was trying to make a personal movie out of a giant bug movie, and on this one I was just trying to have fun. There were no discrepancies. I was not trying to make Blade into a Byronic hero. I was trying to have Blade be Blade and have his universe be his universe—just tweak it a little bit to be more oriented towards the Gothic stuff that I like. When you're dealing with bigger budgets, you also have to deal with more clarity on what you want and why you want it. Early enough on, if you feel it's the wrong project, don't do it. That's the thing I learned and what I enjoyed about this one. I made sure early on that we were all on the same page—Wesley, the studio and I. And we were."

While admitting that he hasn't seen the finished film at press time, Ron Perlman nonetheless believes that they should have one of those rarities—a superior sequel. "You can count on a couple of fingers sequels that sort of overtook the original," said Perlman. "ALIENS was the most obvious. I think we have a chance of doing the same here. I reserve judgment until it's all finished and I see it, but it sure felt really good. The best part of it was that it was better when we finished than it was when we started out to do it. We went out there to do a movie that was on the page and stuff happened every day that added layers to it and turned it into something more complex and more interesting."

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BLADE 2

Special Effects

The Sequel Will Better the Original in Many Regards

By Edward Gross

When writer/producer David Goyer sat down with producer Peter Frankfurt to discuss *BLADE 2*, the first thing the duo did was look at the original to see what areas needed improvement.

"In the main," said Goyer, "we were really disappointed with the visual effects of the first film, which is one of the areas in the new film that are just spectacular. I'm blown away by some of the stuff I've seen, and I'm not using hyperbole. That was an area we failed to deliver on in the first film, and something that we corrected this time out."

The first step in "correcting" the situation was the hiring of Academy Award-win-

ning Visual Effects Supervisor, Nick Brooks, who made his name as visual effects supervisor on *WHAT DREAMS MAY COME* (1998). Additionally, although he isn't credited for it on-screen, he co-designed and developed the "bullet time" process for *THE MATRIX*, and served as digital compositor on *FIGHT CLUB* (1999). For the past three years, Brooks has directed a number of music videos (under the co-directing mantle of Honey), but found himself getting restless, his interests moving back to the big screen.

"I was missing feature film ideas, budgets, and technology," he admitted. "Videos are limited in their resource, time,

and money. You don't get, as on *BLADE*, four months of preproduction. The videos are pumped out very fast."

Steered to the project by a friend of his, Brooks met with

producer, another coup for *BLADE 2*, as MacLeod's background included Vi-



ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT: New hardware (below) and a new, darker tone from director Guillermo del Toro (right, with star Wesley Snipes) saw the effects roster for *BLADE 2* double from an originally-scheduled three hundred shots.



director Guillermo del Toro, and two days later had the job. "Guillermo and I got along fantastically, and never looked back from there," he said. A week or so later, Susan MacLeod was brought in as Visual Effects Pro-

ducer, another coup for *BLADE 2*, as MacLeod's background included Visual Effects Manager on *DIE HARD WITH A VENGEANCE* (1995), Visual Effects Production Supervisor on *ERASER* (1996), and Visual Effects Producer on *MY FAVORITE MARTIAN* (1999) and *HOLLOW MAN* (2000).

"At that point, the script wasn't fully developed," noted Brooks. "Although Steve Johnson's XFX had started testing on the animatronics and makeup, the visual effects were wide



COOPERATIVE EFFORT: Numerous effects houses combined makeup, animatronic, and digital technologies to bring BLADE 2's Reapers to gory life (or is that death?).

open. This made the project very attractive to me. Guillermo, Peter, and David wanted to move BLADE 2 away from the original, and at the same time keep continuity. So we decided to update the VFX of the original BLADE, keeping the fans happy, but also introduce more radical visual ideas.

"For instance, there was a similar amount of 'ash-carbon' shots [images of impaled vampires dissolving into ash] planned for the second BLADE. We decided to book-end these and create beauty deaths. These shots are slow motion, highly graphic, and intricately choreographed ash-

carbons. There is also a new form of incineration in BLADE 2, called UV deaths, administered by ultraviolet light doled out from specially modified guns and grenades. Bookending the ash-carbon and UV deaths with beauty shots meant that we could move faster through the rest of incineration deaths, leaving us free to diversify the range of the remaining effects and enter new territory."

So ambitious were the effects for BLADE 2 that the work was farmed out to different outfits to benefit from their particular field of expertise. For instance, XFX handled animatronics, prosthetics, and special make-ups. CFC in London handled the various ash

carbons (lead by VFX Supervisors Rob Duncan, Dominic Parker, and Justin Martin), Tippett Studios took on the CG character work and the El-Cam shots (more on that below); CORE Digital Pictures was assigned the UV deaths; with Pixel Magic and Riot handling the remaining effects.

"The hope," said MacLeod, "is that it all blends seamlessly together and nobody knows that there were different companies involved. But the visual effects are a challenge when you've got a show like BLADE, which isn't an extraordinarily high budget. It's a decent budget, but it's certainly not HARRY POTTER. It ends up that the most economical

and best way to do it is to break it up to different facilities. But you try and make those breaks in an intelligent fashion, as we did. Breaking out all the character work to Tippett, all the disintegrations to CFC, and so on, you're not in jeopardy as much as you might otherwise be with people noticing a different style. But if we had five different facilities doing vampire deaths, we would have been in a lot of trouble. The look would have been all over the map. So you try to stick with one style. In those instances where you do have extra work and maybe one facility can't deal with it, you show the other facilities the established look and have

them match it.

"We, at a very early stage in preproduction, actually had some great conceptual artists do a lot of different drawings. That was the starting point for establishing the look that we wanted. More often than not, we establish the look and just ask the facility to bring it to life and bring whatever they can to the table, which they did very well."

Probably the greatest challenge facing the visual effects team was the fact that in its earliest days, *BLADE 2* had about three hundred visual effects shots, but during production that number pretty much doubled.

"Some of that you expect over the normal course of production and you allow for contingencies," MacLeod pointed out. "There's no way—especially in action movies—to anticipate the number of cuts there are going to be. You don't want to confine the editor or the director from their job of cutting to-

gether a good scene. Storyboards, which we had a lot of, are great, but when you end up getting the footage, an actor does something or there's a certain action and you end up with more cuts. That's almost always the case. You just make an allowance for some additional cuts. Every time we got a sequence shot and then edited, we would go through it with the director and be as thrifty as we could where we needed to be in holding off on certain things until we knew where the overall stood. We've done pretty well, actually, in accommodating more than double the number of shots than were initially in the breakdown. A lot of those are simple wire removal type shots that are counted in that overall total. The number definitely grew, but it's pretty much the norm in our field that it does."

Brooks emphasized that a definite challenge on a project like *BLADE 2*, because it is, at its core, an action movie, is to "keep the

beat".

"A lot of shots are done on Steadicam, so we are keeping the camera moving and keeping the rhythm," he explained. "I don't want our visual effects shots slowing things down. There are a number of virtual cinematography shots (similar to the work started in *THE MATRIX*), where the actors and environments are fully computer generated. For instance, Blade jumps out a warehouse window and falls seventy feet. For the portion where he's actually falling, he's CG and the environment is CG, but the moment he lands, he's real. We're doing a lot of blending between CG and live action.

"When we were designing these shots early on in our planning, I tried to come up with a name for them—these action shots that blended live action and CG—and I ended up calling them L-Cam shots for Liberated Camera. Guillermo added his own latin twist and they became El-Cam. Basically they're set pieces for action se-

quences where we want to really turn up the volume. Tippet Studios was hired to complete these shots. Supervisors Blair Clark and Craig Hayes and their team have created twelve El-Cam shots that really set the future standard of virtual cinematography, both dramatically and technologically."

MacLeod explained that achieving these shots required great care. It began with the taking of detailed, still photographs of the sets so that the scenery could be recreated in CG, followed by detailed stills and measurements of the actors so that they, too, could be accurately reproduced. "It's something that has been done, but not often, so it's fairly new and was fairly new to the crew," MacLeod pointed out. "We had to do a little more explaining than we might do on other things. Motion-control shots people pretty much understand. When you get into these particular kind of CG shots, you have to sort of explain the process so people are on the same page.

VIRTUAL VAMPIRES: The elaborate nature of *BLADE 2*'s action sequences saw whole shots created in the computer. But is this one of them?



"Then you have to say to the director, 'Oh, we need the set for a day to take stills with no people on it, but we need all the lighting intact, all the set dressing intact, all the props that are there so we can recreate it in CG.' Those are the time-consuming shots we have in the movie, as well from our standpoint, because we have to create the whole thing. Nick started off doing some pre-visualization on that type of shot, which was helpful, so we knew exactly what we needed to shoot when the time came.

"The other challenge was not knowing the choreography in advance. It was something where we had to work closely with stunts. We knew well enough in advance so that we could execute what we needed to do, but we didn't want to lock anybody into anything either. We wanted to be as flexible as we could be to make the shots and the scene as good as they could be. There was a bit of improvisation on some of those shots, but, as much as we could, we planned in advance to get what we needed."

Stunt coordinator Jeff Ward admitted that he was happy to go with the flow and work out the choreography of the fight sequences to accommodate the effects. "Everything is choreographed, but there is always room for improvisation because something may happen and I'll say, 'Wow, let's go with that,'" said Ward. "I never set anything up to be written in stone unless that's the word handed down by the director or Wesley, who's producer and star. I have to view the effects as enhancements, in terms of, 'Okay, he's a vampire, he should be able to do these incredible things.' It was definitely a team effort in terms of the way things work."

Probably one of the biggest challenges facing the crew was pulling everything off in the allotted time period, as some visual effects sequences required more work than others. "You certainly need to plan the way certain things are going to be shot," said MacLeod. "On a lot of the disintegrations you need multiple photographic elements that you shoot on a set in order to get what you need.

You need the actor on the plate, then you need a plate without the actor on it, so that when you kill him, you've got the background. The significant portion of the work that's not wire removal work is very well-planned in advance and broken down by all the elements that we need.

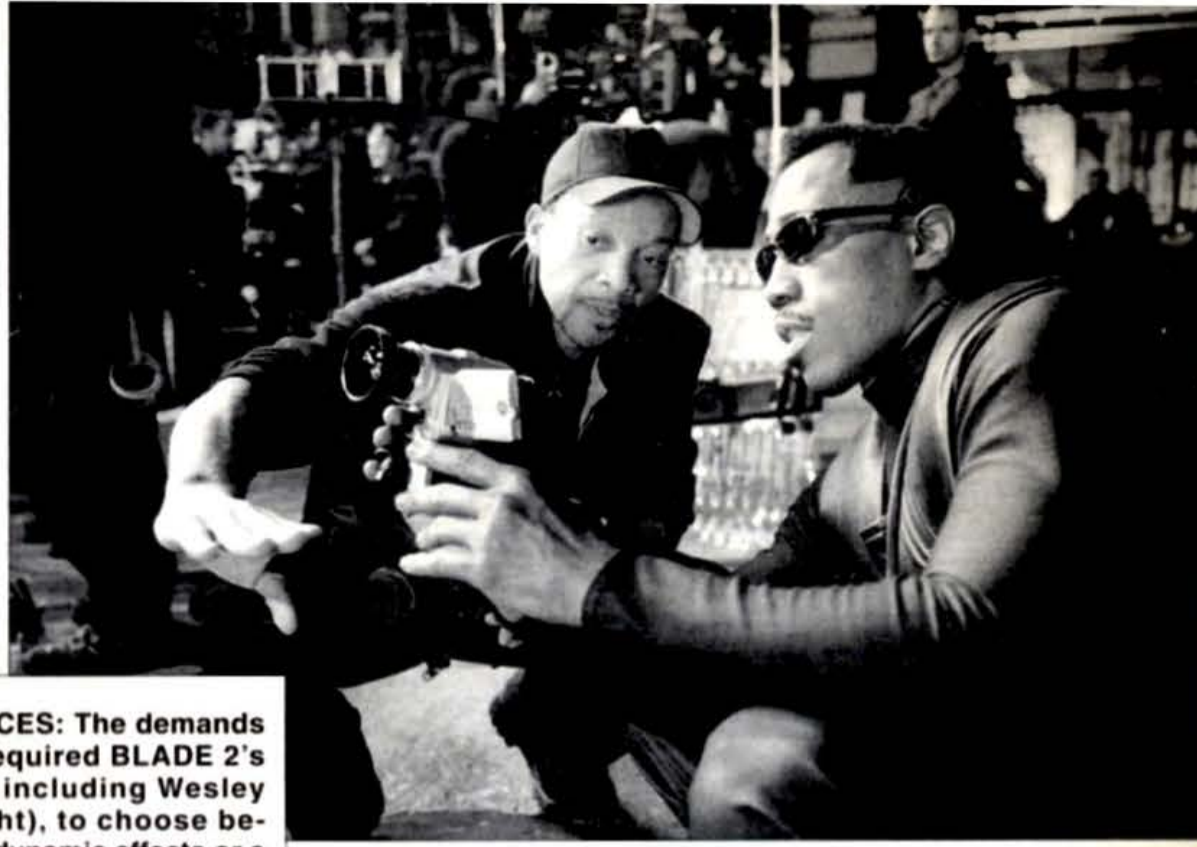
"Then we discuss that with the director, the director of photography, and the producer of the movie, because there's also a time factor. Do you want to go motion-control with this shot?

Well, it's going to be a great-looking shot, but it's going to take two or three more hours on the set to do it. There's those kind of decisions that get weighed in preproduction this way there's not a surprise on the set when it comes to the point where you're killing ten vampires and you say, 'Okay, it's a three-hour shot.'

"Due to the film's production timeline, we had a limited post-production schedule. It was a huge challenge, because in Prague we were on a six-day shooting week and the only time that the director had a chance to go into the cutting room was on Sundays. It was tough because we would have to cut the sequences over the weekend, have meetings on Sunday, and it ended up being a seven-day work week for six months in Prague. That was intense. Hats off to Guillermo and editorial for that."

For virtually everyone involved—from Goyer to del Toro and the visual effects team—one of the most intriguing aspects of *BLADE 2* was the film's new breed of vampire, the Reapers, which were created through a flawless blending of actors, animatronics, and CG prosthetics.

"I'm actually blown away by the Reapers on this film," enthused Brooks. "Both the XFX animatronic and CG prosthetic mouth maw created at Tippett Studios are shocking. The CG prosthetic maw matches the animatronic really well. Basically it's a mutation of the feeding mouth of a Reaper, with an extreme anatomy



HARD CHOICES: The demands of budget required *BLADE 2*'s producers, including Wesley Snipes (right), to choose between more dynamic effects or a faster production schedule.

somewhere between a

snake and an insect—it's a pretty disgusting and alien image of this reaper's face opening up. The realism of the Tippett work is incredible—I think it's the best I've ever seen of this type of work. First of all, the design that Guillermo, XFX, and the conceptual artists came up with is really good; it's anatomical functions are based in some scientific relevance, as opposed to a lot of film creatures where the creatures are so badly designed that, no matter how well you implement the design, the anatomy dictates that in motion they'll either walk like a duck or talk like a duck. As a result, the audience won't buy it. This thing works because of its design, the drama of the shots, the skill of the animators, and its seamless integration."

The fact that the Reapers can be realized so effectively just drives home the point that more and more filmmakers can capture virtually anything they can imagine on film. "What's interesting," mused MacLeod, "is people think that since digital effects have been around for fifteen or twenty years, the cost should come down. It's quite the opposite. The more that computers come down in cost and you're able to get faster processors, more ram, and better software, the more people want to push the envelope. As a result, it's always on the edge. You're constantly pushing the machines to do as much as they can because there's a certain desire from the audience to have something more spectacular than the last time."

Interjected Brooks, "I really don't think that there is anything that cannot be done. Since *JURASSIC PARK*, there really haven't been that many places we can't go. All successful effects are driven by story, action, and attitude, which is why *THE MATRIX* worked so well. The standard is raised by good stories, and the grail is making a good movie."

MacLeod's view is that the ultimate goal, or "holy grail," as she puts it, of filmmakers is to create completely realistic-looking CG humans. "Every year has seen a greater success in this area," she said, "but it's such a coordinated effort between so many people to get a digital animated creature or person to look good, to act well. When you've got an actor, it's coming out of them. When you've got a digital character, you've got people animating, you've got people texturing, you've got people lighting. It's a tremendous challenge to pull it off. It's definitely great for specific instances. In *BLADE 2*, we had some CG stuntwork that couldn't have been done with human beings, but I don't think that digital actors will ever replace real actors in photo-realistic movies like this."

For Brooks, the visual effects team will have accomplished its goals on *BLADE 2* if the audience simply has fun with the movie. "I want them to be thrilled," he offered simply. "With the Reapers, I want them to be so completely taken in and then grossed out by the creature that they really don't care if it is animatronic or CG. Realism is one of our goals, but entertainment is the highest. CFQ

By Dan Scapperotti

THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE is only Guillermo del Toro's fourth film since *CRONOS* in 1993. He followed that with the mainstream monster movie, *MIMIC*, in 1997 and *BLADE 2*, which gets released on March 29th. "The difficult thing is to find projects that can be addressed visually or can be addressed thematically," del Toro said. "It also takes time developing them. This is a genre where the producing side and the creative sides tend to just try to do a quick one for the buck. I, on the other hand, fell in love with it growing up. I think it was one of the most beautiful genres for the creation of images in the sense of magic, and all of that. Sometimes it's a little upstream, but I can't complain."

It took the director three-and-a-half years to get *THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE* into



to do a ghost story that dealt with what is a ghost," he said. "Beyond being just [about] a translucent, ectoplasmic thing that appears at the end of a corridor, I wanted very much to find a story that could deal with it as something you lose, something that was pending, a task that was destroyed, a future that never happened. Then, all of a sudden, when I was developing the screenplay, I decided the

which raged during the late 1930's. "One of the main reasons I chose the Spanish Civil War was that it itself is kind of a ghost that announces World War II," said del Toro. "The Spanish Civil War was used by the Fascists, especially Germany, to test weapons and tactics that were later put to use in World War II. At the same time, if we take the orphanage in the movie as a microcosm of what

War, in simplistic terms, is left against right."

The production was centered in and around Madrid, with the furthest location only about an hour and a half outside the city. Del Toro intended to use Santa Lucia as a microcosm of the war raging outside. "It represents Spain, which was basically like that: left alone in many respects by the rest of the world," he said. "The international brigades were not official organizations. The aid coming from the United States was not official. The United States, England, and France, who were the biggest allies Spain could have hoped for, basically decided to leave it alone in the middle of nowhere, so to speak. We built the facade completely in the middle of a desert, and we built the interior patio and a lot of other sets to create sort of what I term my 'Mario Bava' western."

The ghostly figure of the

The Devil's

production. Set against the backdrop of the Spanish Civil War, the film takes place at the Santa Lucia School, an isolated orphanage where the strong-willed and one-legged headmistress, Carman, fights to feed the growing number of children, and the school bully, Jamie, seems to harbor a dark secret born from the disappearance of his friend, Santi (Junio Valverde). Soon, ten-year-old Carlos (Fernando Tielve), a boy left at the school after his father is killed in the war, begins to see the ghostly apparition of a young boy whose head oozes a steady stream of blood.

"The shoot was actually not that long," said del Toro, "but it was a very good schedule. We had fifty days of shooting, which, for a movie with so many kid actors and the time restrictions that that implies, is a very good schedule."

The director wanted to create a variation on the ghost story. "The idea for me was to try

best thing to do was really take that situation to the ultimate consequence and make it in the background of war. Since war is the most destructive force in the universe and is the thing that melts paths, destroys futures, and kills people, I wanted very much to hint at the possibility that it destroys the soul."

For his conflict, del Toro chose the Spanish Civil War,

is going on outside, then the war itself was sort of an indoor war—you know: father against son; brother against brother—and I wanted to choose a conflict that would serve as a microcosm of what it was going to create and a conflict that was easy to understand, so people wouldn't be worried about the particulars watching the film. Essentially the Spanish Civil

boy that haunts the school is made even more ghostly by a del Toro-designed effect that shows the blood spilling from its head seeming to float away. "It was very much designed that way by me, because I'd been dreaming about that image for many years. I wanted to have the character look like a broken porcelain doll that was bleeding constantly. In one of my earliest sketches of the character, the blood flowing in the air appeared, and I decided that was a beautiful idea. An even more beautiful idea, though, would be if he died in water, and the water followed him around wherever he went. I realized that concept for the makeup effects would have to be realized in digital post-production. That is one of the images in the movie that I like the most. We had to do a lot of R&D to get to it because it was not easy to reproduce the feeling of blood dispersing in water with 3D animation, but I'm

BURDENS OF AGE: The fatal flaws of the proprietors of the Santa Lucia School (Marisa Paredes above, Berta Ojea below), mean their young charges will soon have to fend for themselves in *THE DEVIL'S BACKBONE*.



BACKBONES

happy with the results.”

Originally the makeup effects team wasn't thrilled with del Toro's design. They suggested that the ghost feature more rotting flesh. The director, however, was adamant. "I said, 'No,' because the beautiful thing about this ghost is [it's] almost kabuki," he said. "I remember how impressed I was as a child seeing the ghost girl in *KILL BABY KILL*, the Mario Bava movie, which was later put to better use by Federico Fellini in the "Toby Dammit" segment of *SPIRITS OF THE DEAD*. I felt it was to be that white, that Kabuki-like ghost. It wasn't supposed to be real or 'anchored by reality;' it was going to be a porcelain, broken doll because that was the presentation of innocence broken."

The two worlds of Santa Lucia are both divided. The adults—Carman and the elderly Professor Casares (Federico Luppi)—have the welfare of the youngsters at heart, but Jacinto (Eduardo Noriega), a product of the school, is a sinister figure intent on laying his hands on the gold he knows Carman has secreted within the school. Ultimately the children must fend for themselves when the adults fail them.

"The idea for me was to sort of leave the children to their own devices, and have them come together as a group," said del Toro. "This is like the *LORD OF THE FLIES* in that sense. Whereas in *LORD OF THE FLIES* you get to experience that microcosm of humanity, as the children are representative of two factions—the thinking man's faction and the

warring faction—here I wanted to show them coming together at the end. We start the movie with two antagonistic groups of children: the newcomer and those who support him; and the school bully. At the end of the movie, they come together very nicely. For that to happen, I wanted to have them let down by every adult in the movie. It's actually very sad to see a character like the old professor, who means well but is incapable of carrying through his promises, letting the children down again and again until they take matters into their own hands."

To set this up, del Toro's adult characters all lack some critical quality. "I wanted to show that the adult characters were incomplete; only the children joining together were complete," he said. "You have the perfect,

romantic lover in Professor Casares, but he's impotent. Then you have the perfect sexual lover in Jacinto, but he has no heart. You have the perfect revolutionary, a thinking woman of action, in Carman (Marisa Paredes), but she lacks a leg. I wanted those to be used as symbols in a fairy tale.

"It was interesting in Carman having that kind of fire inside her. She was a very brave woman, but she was tied to one place in the world because of the lack of a leg. With all the adults trying to overcome limitations, they don't

make it. It's the children who make it."

Del Toro's major challenge on the film was working with his young cast. "One of the most difficult things is the work with the children," said the director. "I would say—all technical things aside, which are always just calculated exercises or rehearsals and trial and errors—the real challenge is to work with the kids. I decided early on to treat them as adults. They sometimes have little monologues of a minute or more without the camera cutting away,

or dialogue scenes in a group of five or ten children again in a master shot. I think that was the biggest challenge.

"Second to that was a challenge that took years to solve, which was to meld effectively the war tale, the melodrama, and the ghost story into one. More than a ghost story, I wanted this to be a story *with* a ghost. In a ghost story everything depends on a ghost storyline; in this one, I wanted to have several storylines going, including that of a ghost that acts as a guide for the movie." CFQ

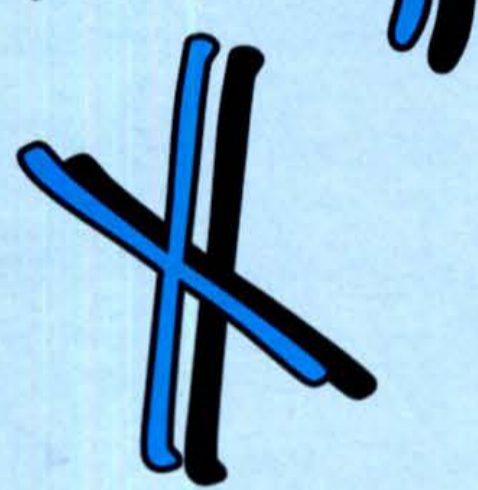


SPECTRE OF WAR: Junio Valverde is a young ghost who haunts the corridors of a Spanish orphanage.

Guillermo del Toro's Other Film Mixes Politics and Poltergeists in War-Torn Spain

"Why do you keep watching the *THE X-FILES*?"

Age, these past few years, that's the question often lobbed by diehard X-FILES fans at the newly disaffected who complained about the show's surprisingly quick spiral



downwards into a black hole of incoherent plotting and characterization. The answer is simple: fans—or ex-fans—continue to watch because, for the first three seasons or so, *THE X-FILES* was so damn good. Stay-home-on-Friday-nights good. Emmy-nominated-even-though-it's-a-genre-show good. Capture-the-nation's-imagina-

tion good (you couldn't open a magazine or newspaper circa 1995 without finding an X-FILES reference). So good that, years past its prime, people still watch, if only to moan about how much better it used to be, and to see how the story of two FBI agents, Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) and Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson), would end.

THE X-FILES—created and produced by Chris Carter, whose credits previously had been in Disney TV-movies and sitcoms—started out as the Fox Network's second-favorite child, the net's executives assuming that *THE ADVENTURES OF BRISCO COUNTY, JR.*, an entertaining western/sf/fantasy/what-have-you hybrid starring cult fave Bruce Campbell—would be the break-out show for the fall of 1993. And at first, *THE X-FILES*'s ratings weren't anything to get excited about, although it kept winning the desirable young male audience demographic. But word-of-mouth began to bring in the viewers, and by the end of the season, *THE X-FILES* had turned into a hot property, even meriting a write-up in *The New Yorker*.

THE X-FILES had to be the most unlikely stew to appear on television in years. Its two heroes, Dana Scully, trained forensic pathologist and servant of justice, and Fox Mulder, expert profiler of serial killers,

hunter of all things paranormal and alien, and archetypal quester—specifically in search of a long-missing sister—spent their days in the FBI's X-Files division investigating unsolved cases. Mulder, who believed his sister had been abducted by aliens, found evidence of aliens, mutants, and government conspirators everywhere. Scully, the doctor, thought he was deluded and tried to keep him on the straight and narrow, while he tried to broaden her perceptions. They incarnated

the timeless debate between belief and skepticism, but they had a goal in common: the truth.

The show blended a broad range of familiar genres—horror, fantasy, science fiction, police procedural, medicine, conspiracy—and drew inspiration from, well, just about everything, including such acknowledged Carter inspirations as *THE NIGHT STALKER*, *THE AVENGERS*, *SILENCE OF THE LAMBS*, *ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN*, not to

without, but within: our government; our parents; even ourselves. It was a vision that had been mined for several decades in films, television, and books, but had never been brought so forcefully before to the small screen.

Yet if *THE X-FILES* portrayed America at its worst, it also portrayed America at its best in its lead characters, Mulder and Scully, whose search for truth through a fog of deception and the barriers of their own preconceptions, gave the show a sense of hope. Mulder and Scully were anything but conventional television heroes. They seemed so real: deadpan; glum; stubborn; sometimes annoying (especially Mulder); occasionally



not easy to like. Mulder had a well-developed



sar-

castic streak and used it often. They solved their investigations using their

brains, not their brawn. They weren't perfect. They made mistakes.

Mulder was the butt of jokes from other FBI agents who also thought Scully was nuts not to demand a transfer. He doubted himself and sometimes thought about giving up. They both got scared. They got angry. There was always the danger that Mulder would give up, or find himself trapped, like the show's primary villain, the (once-great) Cigarette Smoking Man, in a quest he didn't believe in—compelled to go on, because that quest was all that life allowed him.

By the end of the first season, Mulder and Scully had become a classic team, sparking off and inspiring each other, the chemistry (dubbed UST for "Unresolved Sexual Tension" by the fans) thick between them. The smallest gesture had significance. It was a partnership of equals, even if Mulder nominally headed up the two-person X-Files division and Scully never got her own desk or her name on the door.

Somehow, Carter and his first-season writers managed to stir all of this into something that seemed new and fresh and very real, as if these fantastical things could be happening in our very own lives. The dialogue was clever, the storylines engrossing, and the cinematography by Canadian John Bartley (the show was shot in Vancouver)

The Age of Mulder and Scully Ends with the Ultimate Mystery: What Went Wrong?

mention Watergate, John Mack's book *Abduction: Human Encounters With Aliens*, and the daily headlines, particularly those of the supermarket tabloids. Other precedents included classic quest myths and legends, Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories, film noir (you can draw a straight line from Humphrey Bogart and other noir detectives, who, like Mulder, cracked wise in uncertain and treacherous times), Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, and a host of genre films and television like *BEYOND REALITY*, *PROBE*, the *QUATERMASS* movies, *WOLFEN*, *FIRE IN THE SKY*, *TWIN PEAKS*, and the Fox Network's own cheesy reality show, *SIGHTINGS*. And Mulder probably had a lifetime subscription to *THE FORTEAN TIMES*.

Carter and his first season writing staff (writing partners Glen Morgan and James Wong, and Howard Gordon and Alec Gansa) sampled liberally from all the preoccupations and fears of the end of the Millennium. The *X-FILES* happily dove into stories about aliens, mutants, genetic tinkering, recovered memories, and the general, free-floating paranoid anxiety that something was going on and there was a conspiracy afoot—probably by the government—to hide it from you. *THE X-FILES* gave us a vision of America betrayed, not by enemies



NOT SPOOKY ENOUGH: The introduction of special agent Doggett was supposed to launch **THE X-FILES** into its post-Mulder phase, but indifferent writing and lack of chemistry between Robert Patrick and Gillian Anderson scuttled those plans.

grew ever more beautiful as the seasons progressed. (Unfortunately, Bartley left at the end of the third season, but not before winning an Emmy for his work on "Grotesque.")

Although Season One occasionally experienced rough patches, it was nonetheless great television, the episodes almost like mini-movies. The second season was even better, turning out a high proportion of wonderful segments. In a classic make-lemonade-out-of-lemons scenario, the writers developed a superb opening arc that season, written around star Gillian Anderson's pregnancy that brought both Scully and Mulder to an emotional and physical brink. The second season also saw the arrival of Darin Morgan (Glen's younger brother), who introduced an entirely new tone to the show, one more overtly comic, although it was the driest and most deadpan comedy possible. The X-FILES newsgroup, which in those early years of the internet had become an important gathering spot for the show's fans, was flooded with approving messages after the broadcast of "Humbug," Morgan's first episode. They loved his work, and so did the professional community: Morgan's third-season episode, "Clyde Bruckman's Final Repose," won him the show's only Emmy for writing.

Yet, as the show headed into the third and fourth seasons, there were also problems. There seemed to be a disconnect between what had come to be called the "mythology" episodes that followed Mulder's investigation of a government conspiracy hiding the existence of aliens on earth (as well as the secret of his sister's disappearance), and the "stand-alone" episodes. After experiencing life-altering events in the mythology episodes, Mulder and Scully would be back to normal in the stand-alones, leaving fans to wonder why they seemed so unaffected. Scully kept seeing bizarre things, but always insisted everything could be explained scientifically. The mythology itself, with all the various aliens and conspiracies, was beginning to be more ridiculous than threatening.

Then something broke in the fourth season. Although the season didn't get off to a strong start with the mythology episode, "Herrenvolk," the few new episodes were good to great. Morgan and Wong, who had departed in the second season to create a new show for Fox (*SPACE: ABOVE AND BEYOND*), returned to write four episodes that, with one exception, focused on the idea that Mulder and Scully didn't know each other as well as they thought they did. The intent was to create a season exploring the theme of trust between Mulder and Scully, but Carter and new his right-hand man, Frank Spotnitz, took the show in another direction entirely. Forget trust; they fell back on the oldest and lamest trick for "character development": they made Scully sick with cancer in the excruciatingly mopey episode, "Memento Mori." This crucial aspect of

Scully's life was then thoroughly ignored for the rest of the season, except in the episode "Elegy." The writers "explained" Scully was receiving treatment "off-screen," although she exhibited none of the side effects of chemotherapy or radiation.

Scully eventually recovered (and in highly melodramatic fashion, too, in "Redux II"), although *THE X-FILES* never did. There were still some good episodes to come, particularly Duchovny's writing/directing debut "The Unnatural," but they were fewer and further between. The mythology grew more and more ponderous, as the writers kept trying to top each twist with one supposedly mind-boggling revelation after another, none of which ever answered anything. The online fans went nuts trying to reconcile all the inconsistencies and plot holes. The various aliens (greys, shapeshifters, clones, oil aliens, monsters grown from viruses, human-alien hybrids, and more) multiplied faster than kudzu in the Deep South and were just as strangling to story logic.

The villains suffered too. The Cigarette Smoking Man (William B. Davis) grew toothless. Krycek (Nicholas Lea) virtually disappeared and reappeared, mostly just to jerk other characters around. The doomed members of the Syndicate never had any personality, except for the oily and reptilian Well-Mannered Man, played by the superb John Neville. Meanwhile, the standalone episodes became formulaic, needlessly graphic, and as enigmatic as a roadmap—Mulder and Scully often did little detective work to solve a case. Attempts to copy Darin Morgan's brand of humor fell flat, particularly in the sixth season's run of "humorous" episodes. The season cliffhangers left fans yawning, especially whenever they featured a "Is Mulder dead?" scenario. An X-FILES feature film released between the fifth and sixth seasons failed to find a genuine audience, and a long-promised move of the production from Vancouver to Los Angeles, beginning with the sixth season, failed to improve matters.

But worst of all was the damage done to the characters, particularly Mulder and Scully. Mulder's leaps of intuition, his "genius," became more and more improbable, examples of lazy writing that kept the two agents from genuine detecting. Mulder's declaration in the pilot that he needed evidence too, just like Scully, was forgotten, and his own innate skepticism and critical sense vanished. Instead, he'd put his faith in the wildest theories without a shred of evidence, and was consistently right only because the show's default was set to "P" for "paranormal." Mulder became an automaton, to be whipped back and forth as required. If the plot called for him to give up his deeply held beliefs

merely on the say-so of one government official, then he did so; a few episodes later, he was a believer once again. He had no reaction to the end of his lifelong quest in "Closure;" no reaction to nearly dying from an alien brain disease; no reaction to being tortured by aliens in the eighth season. One could argue that from the beginning he was emotionless, but that was part of Mulder's point. When the rage did bubble to the surface, it was jarring and uncontrolled, but never bullying—at least, when done right, as in "One Breath." Seeing Mulder threaten the taunting Cigarette Smoking Man in that episode was one thing; seeing him slap around and pistol-whip the doctor in "Emily" was quite another, and painful to watch for all the wrong reasons.

Scully went from strong and independent to depressed, whiny, and ultimately irrelevant, except for her role as mother-to-be. The subtext of the show, once Scully lost her ova to the conspiracy doctors, seemed to be that every woman wants to be a mother. The X-FILES writers seemed to think that the way to deepen her was to degrade her, either by making her sick (cancer), or by medically violating her, or by giving her some sort of maternal urge. The young woman who wanted to make a name for herself in the FBI—but not at the expense



of her ethics or compassion for victims—became a victim herself of the writers' idealization of her. In those first seasons, she had friends—she had a life. The writers snuffed out those signs of normalcy, put her on a pedestal, and robbed her of her sexuality, not only literally by robbing her of her ova, but by making her celibate and untouchable: the Virgin Scully. She turned into a woman with two modes of behavior: weepy or hostile. In the eighth season, a pregnant Scully is punished for attempts at

independent thought and action, pushed to the sidelines, made subordinate to her new partner, the man's man Agent Doggett, and protests not at all. (She's not thrilled to see Doggett at first, but before long she's telling him what a great guy he is.)

Mulder and Scully received the same kind of treatment as partners that they received as individuals. Their relationship, with the underlying UST, had arisen naturally out of Duchovny and Anderson's on-screen chemistry and their characters' continuing intellectual and philosophical debate about the nature of the world. Once the writers consciously attempted to write an attraction between them, it foundered, and then died when the X-



seemed like the writers wished Mulder had never come back, given the uncharitable way they treated him. The eighth season Scully didn't appear pregnant until well into the season (just like when she

years, if we can find a way out of the terrible conflict created by the events of last September 11, darker stories will once again come to the fore, in the same way film noir blossomed in the years following World War II.

There is no reason to suppose the remainder of the X-FILES' Season Nine will be any better. Even Fox execs couldn't avoid the obvious truth; finally throwing in the towel by denying the series a tenth season. Don't expect impassioned letter-writing campaigns to save this show.

Yet there is no diminishing what went before. We'll always have "Deep Throat" or "Conduit" or "E.B.E." or "One Breath" or "Duane Barry" or "Clyde Bruckman's Final Repose" or "Pusher" or "Paper Hearts" or whatever episode made your heart pound and your

eyes tear up. Now that the first four seasons of THE X-FILES are available on DVD, fans old and new (and thanks to syndication and home video, there will always be new fans) can discover, in the best format available for home viewing, what made the show so great.

So as THE X-FILES shoots along into a creative flameout, let's sit back and enjoy the classic episodes, remembering that, just because Chris Carter has stopped believing, we shouldn't be prevented from celebrating the work of Carter, Glen Morgan, Darin Morgan, James Wong, Howard Gordon, Alex Gansa, Vince Gilligan, David Duchovny, and everyone else who contributed to the show at its best. Like Mulder, we shall look to the future, and move on with a smile. Because, when all is said and done, we can honestly say we had a wonderful time. **CFQ**

ROLE REVERSAL: What started out as partnership between two strong, competent equals (above, from the first season ep. "E.B.E."), had become a stereotypical love relationship by season eight (left, from "Dead Alive"). **TOP RIGHT:** Mulder and Doggett bury the hatchet, to little avail.

Team gave into a persistent fan demand for some kind of romantic relationship. This "romance" was treated the same way as Scully's cancer: mostly ignored; occasionally hinted at; usually permitted to occur almost entirely off-screen, even though it seemed to have culminated in a baby.

As for the eighth season, nearly everything the production team did went wrong. Mulder's replacement, Agent John Doggett (Robert Patrick), turned out to be hopelessly conventional, a typical TV male protagonist who would not have distinguished THE X-FILES if he had been the lead when it started. Into the mix was thrown another new character: Special Agent Monica Reyes (Annabeth Gish), a New Ager and a specialist in Satanic rituals—an odd combination to say the least, given that there is no connection between the two. Duchovny's return to the show in the second half of the season was completely botched—it

had cancer).

She often made stupid decisions (her *modus operandi* for the past few seasons), acquiesced to whatever Doggett wanted, and then beamed as the newly enshrined mother, Mulder by her side. Even the most loyal of fans grew restless watching the eighth season, yet enough of us stayed on, a market considerable enough to guarantee a ninth season.

Even so, the times have bypassed THE X-FILES. The public mood had turned away from the well-worn, evil-government-conspiracy narrative towards something more simple and reassuring. World War II, the "just war," became a popular setting for films and TV, particularly if it involved American's favorite son, Tom Hanks. THE WEST WING, about an upstanding, moral president and his equally upstanding White House staff, won the Emmy for best dramatic series. Perhaps in a few

THE X-FILES

SEASON EIGHT EPISODE GUIDE

By Paula Vitaris

"I don't want you doing anything to upset your pregnancy."

—Skinner

WITHIN

★★

11/5/00. Editor: Louise Willingham. Written by Chris Carter. Directed by Kim Manners.

Picking up where "Requiem" left off—Scully's still pregnant. We know this because she has bad dreams about

backwards and feeding her rumors and innuendo about Mulder in an effort to drag information out of her. Scully's response is to fling a cup of water in his face. Oooh, Scully! You're such a professional! That's what all the *male* agents would do, isn't it?

Meanwhile, someone steals Mulder's and Scully's home computers and FBI files. This leads Scully to the realization that the aliens are trying to remove evidence of their presence, although no indisputable evidence of alien contact has ever been made pub-



Mulder! He's really the Bounty Hunter, disguised as Mulder, here to kidnap Gibson Praise. But Doggett intercepts him, the BH steps off a cliff, hits the ground and breaks his arm (the unnaturally crooked arm is a neat effect), and then disappears into the crowd at the school for the deaf, where Scully, Skinner, and a skeptical Doggett try to flush him out. Gibson Praise has fled to an underground hideaway in the desert. Meanwhile, Doggett is realizing that Kersh has set him up to fail in his investigation. The up-

singer warbling on the soundtrack, or the Mulder family tomb being uncrated in the *FBI office*, or best (or worst) of all: Scully examining Mulder's medical file to discover that he had been *dying all last season*. Funny, we'd been

told he had been cured in "A m o r Fati."

Robert Patrick is solid as

Doggett. He actually makes you believe that he is a good guy, despite his opening

I'LL TAKE MINE WITH A SPLASH: Doggett and Scully "meet cute," X-FILES style, in "Within."

mind-game with Scully. They take the first baby step towards cooperation: she demands respect from him, and he rejoinders, "Give a little, get a little." David Duchovny, in a couple of scenes lasting a few seconds, gets the short end of the stick (or is that the long end of a probe?).

"Hey, you're where the action is."

—Doggett

"What does that tell you, that I'm crazy or I'm right?"

—Scully

WITHOUT

★★

11/12/00. Editor: Chris Willingham. Written by Chris Carter. Directed by Kim Manners.

What a shock—Mulder isn't really

shot of all this is that Kersh (one of the most one-note characters yet on THE X-FILES, and that's saying something) is furious over Doggett's inconclusive report and then, illogically, orders him to partner Scully on the X-Files.

If "Without" is about anything, it's about Scully and Doggett tangling and trying to find a turf on which to co-exist. Once again we hear the phrase, "give a little, get a little," but this time said by Scully to a doubting Doggett. While she and Doggett don't solve any major issues in "Without," at least they are beginning to get used to each other.

Now that Mulder is no longer around, it falls to Scully be the believer, although a reluctant one who believes, not so much because she wants to, but because she needs to, to keep alive her hope for Mulder's return. She doesn't sound all that convinced, whatever the words coming from her mouth.

The big light in the sky turning out to be a helicopter gimmick has gotten way too old.

"You ever carry one of these?"

—Doggett, holding up flashlight

"Never."

—Scully

PATIENCE

★ 1/2

11/19/00. Editor: Lynne Willingham. Written and directed by Chris Carter.

If you're looking for a suspenseful, bite-your-nails, monster-of-the-week X-FILES episode...this isn't it. The teaser is a telegram from Western Union: With all that darkness, thunder,



a fetus that turns into Mulder, she stares into a mirror, and she throws up. Other than that, you'd never know. She shows absolutely no curiosity whatsoever about how she got pregnant when she's supposed to be sterile, and who the father may be. (It's not like the writers seem to have any idea, either.)

Mulder's still missing, although every now and then we get glimpses of him being tortured by aliens. Like Scully's pregnancy, Mulder's absence is little more than lip service, at least in this episode and the next. After that, even the "search" is missing in action.

A team has been formed to search for Mulder, headed up by Special Agent John Doggett (new series regular Robert Patrick). Doggett doesn't get off to a good start with Scully, sitting down next to her with his I.D. tag

lic, and so far, the vast majority of people are indifferent and disbelieving. Scully doesn't wonder about that, though.

Instead, she realizes that the best evidence of alien existence is Gibson Praise (Jeff Gulka), who disappeared two years ago in the sixth season opener, "The Beginning." It takes about three seconds to locate him at a school for the deaf in the middle of the Arizona desert. But Mulder—or someone who looks just like him—beats Scully, Skinner, Doggett, and Co. to the punch, and the episode ends with Doggett confronting the maybe-Mulder at the edge of a cliff, Gibson Praise his captive.

"Within" creates a nice aura of tension and suspense, with suspicion all around. But something risible always pops up to break the mood, whether it's that lady

lightning, and creepy music, you know someone is about to meet his or her end in a nasty way. The victims are an elderly mortician and his wife, and the wounds are so bizarre that Scully and her new partner Doggett are summoned to consult, despite the opposition of local detective Abbott (Bradford English). More people are killed, Doggett finds a newspaper article about some hunters who killed a giant Bat Creature in 1956 after it killed several people. Scully and Doggett discuss the case, and finally we learn that the murdering Bat Thing (Jay Caputo) was the companion or mate of the original Bat-Creature-Thing-Person killed back in 1956, now out for revenge.

The Bat Thing is a dull monster in fake-looking makeup—he just hangs around waiting to kill people, and nobody ventures a scientific explanation for his existence. The interaction between Scully, Doggett, and Detective Abbott keeps the episode from sinking into the mud altogether. Doggett's attitude towards Scully is patronizing (it gets worse in the next episode); observing the blatant sexism from Abbott, he steps in to "help," turning his back on Scully and excluding her from his conversation with Abbott. Scully rightly calls him on this, in one of the episodes few satisfying moments.

"No! No! I'm pregnant! No! No! Don't do this! I'm going to have a baby! No, don't do this! No! I'm going to have a baby! No! No! No! No!"
—Scully

ROADRUNNERS 0

11/26/00. Editor: Chris Willingham. Written by Vince Gilligan. Directed by Rod Hardy.

Bad Scully. Bad, bad Scully. You traipsed off by yourself to Utah for "a consultation" with local cops about a murder, and didn't bother to tell your current partner, that redoubtable "man's man" John Doggett, that you were leaving town. You wore high-

At least you had a glimmer of good sense to call Doggett while on the road, so he would realize later that you were in trouble and hustle out to Utah to rescue you all by his big, strong self. So you learned your lesson, didn't you? Now that you've been violated, degraded, and humiliated, apologize to Doggett, because it was *all your fault*. Promise that you'll never do anything again without telling him, or making sure he's there by your side. Good Scully. Good, good Scully.

"This is great. Now I've got a psychic in my living room that's going to tell me what's wrong with my son."
—Mr. Underwood

INVOCATION ★★

12/3/00. Editor: Michael Kewley. Written by David Amann. Directed by Richard Compton.

"Invocation" is a masterpiece, but only if you grade it on the "Roadrunners" bell-curve. Otherwise, it is merely a run-of-the-mill stand-alone, a combination of "Revelations" and "The Calusari." This time the mysterious boy is named Billy Underwood (Kyle and Ryan Pepi), who was abducted from a school playground ten years ago. One day he mysteriously reappears in the exact place from which he was kidnapped, still a little boy who hasn't aged a day, let alone ten years. For once Scully and Doggett have a case that really deserves their attention.

While the set-up is fairly intriguing, the episode collapses once we realize Billy is a ghost. All the suspicions about Billy, the weird happenings,



MAD MESSIAH: Is Scully paying for her independence when she stumbles upon cultists in "Roadrunners?"

history: At one point during this investigation he pulls out a photo of a little boy and gazes sadly at it. Later a psychic brought in to consult about Billy senses "forces" flowing through Doggett, and says the agent has lost someone. The revelation that there is a tragedy involving Doggett and a child seems like so much *deja vu*. Robert Patrick is a solid actor, but even he cannot overcome such self-imitative writing.

"There's a reason all this is happening."
—Martin Wells

REDRUM ★★★

12/10/00. Editor: Heather Macdougall and Michael Kewley. Teleplay by Steven Maeda. Story by Steven Maeda & Daniel Arkin. Directed by Peter Markle

"Redrum" has the feel of a TWILIGHT ZONE episode, especially since the protagonist is not Scully or Doggett, but Baltimore prosecutor Martin Wells (Joe Morton, in a superb performance), who, in the teaser, wakes up one morning to find himself in a jail cell, accused of murdering his wife Vicky. Guards arrive to hustle him out for transfer to another jail, and during the perp walk, he's shot and killed by his enraged father-in-law.

The first act then opens the day before, the second act the day before that, and so on. It doesn't take long for Martin to realize that each new day—for him—is the past one, not the next one, and that he is the only one who realizes it. Martin enlists the help of his perplexed but loyal friend John Doggett (Scully's appearances are fleeting) to solve the mystery of who killed his wife and why.

"Redrum" becomes a double mystery: on one hand Martin's investigation of his wife's murder; and on the other, an investigation into the workings of his own soul. As Martin clarifies and even changes the events of each preceding day, his own internal landscape becomes ever more

tangled and troubled. Martin does save his wife's life, and in the process saves his own soul. Unfortunately, as Martin sits consigned to another cell at the end, he delivers a superfluous

voiceover that ruins the mood of the final shot.

"We all have a third eye. If we open it, we'd see a new reality, one closer to God. At least that's what Kesey told me on the bus back in '64."
—Frohike

VIA NEGATIVA ★★1/2

12/17/00. Editor: Lynne Willingham. Written by Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Tony Wharmby.

Scully is in the hospital with "abdominal pains," so it's boys night out for Doggett and Skinner. In Pittsburgh, twenty cult members and the two FBI agents staking out their house are murdered, their heads bashed in by an axe. The circumstances are bizarre: All the victims have been found in places locked from within, or too small to sustain the swing of an axe. The main suspect is cult leader Anthony Tipet (Keith Szarabajka, THE EQUALIZER), even though there's no forensic evidence implicating him. Tipet believes that he can achieve the "via negativa"—the dark path to God—through ingestion of a powerful hallucinogenic. As the episode proceeds, Skinner and Doggett begin to surmise that Tipet invades other people's dreams and murders them, psychically, in their sleep: Whatever death he paints for them inside their heads becomes reality.

Tipet is a disappointingly sketchy character (wasting the talents of Szarabajka)—once he splits his head in two, the fourth act is taken up almost entirely by Doggett, now dreaming himself, and thus prey for the comatose Tipet. "Via Negativa" is short on plot but makes up for it by being long on atmosphere and mood, conjuring up a number of disturbing, eerie images, the most ominous that of Tipet, in lotus position, floating above a jailhouse floor. He gazes at Doggett, and when his third eye opens, it's as if it's looking right into your soul, with evil intent.

"You know, Elvis used to do this to his hotel rooms."
—Doggett, looking around a room with bullet holes in the wall

SUREKILL ★1/2

1/7/01. Editor: Michael Kewley. Written by Greg Walker. Directed by Terrence O'Hara.

Twins...there's always a good one



THE SPIRIT RETURNS: The mystery of a kidnapped child restores THE X-FILES to classic territory in "Invocation."

heeled boots and a too-tight shirt into the desert. You'll pay for those sins, by getting stranded in the middle of nowhere, and eventually being tied face-down on a bed by a bunch of wacko cultists who then insert into your back the phallic-shaped giant slug they worship as the latest incarnation of Christ.

they're just red herrings—without them, plus a couple of scenes about the stereotyped "white trash" people involved in Billy's disappearance, "Invocation" would last about fifteen minutes.

Well, twenty minutes, because "In-

and a bad one. In "Surekill," that formula is slightly modified to "bad twin and good twin who does bad things." The bad one, Dwight (Michael Bowen), is legally blind (although he can spot a telephone message light blinking from across the room), and the good one, Randall (Patrick Kilpatrick), can see through, well, everything. Their legit business is the Triple-A Surekill Extermination Agency, but the "rats" they exterminate are drug dealers. Randall, who is not too bright and is dominated by his brother, sees the dealers through walls, aims a gun, and kills them, then Dwight, the "brains" of the operation, makes off with the dealers' drugs and cash. Oh, yes, Scully and Doggett are in this one, too.

"Surekill" takes itself far too seriously. The Surekill office is so moodily lit in noir style you'd think Barbara Stanwyck and Fred MacMurray were about to arrive. Instead, we get the deadly dull trio of Dwight, Randall, and their assistant, Tammy, three of the most lifeless guest characters ever on the show. One shot catches the eye: when Doggett and Scully are looking around the real estate agent's apartment, they turn off the lights, and sunlight from outdoors floods in through bullet holes in the walls. It's a striking image.

"They've got to pay for this. They've all got to pay."

—Ray Pearce

SALVAGE ★ 1/2

1/14/01. Editor: Lynne Willingham. Written by Jeffrey Bell. Directed by Rod Hardy.

Another assembly-line monster-of-the-week episode. The monster in "Salvage" is Ray Pearce (Wade Andrew Williams), a junkyard worker whose exposure to an experimental regenerative substance is slowly turning his



body to metal. The best thing about "Salvage" is the terrific prosthetic makeup for Williams. That makeup is Williams's performance—at the end, when Pearce has transformed entirely into a man made out of bits and pieces of metal, looking like something from the scrap heap, he is an astonishing sight.

Pearce may be a victim of industrial carelessness, but no one meant to

hurt him, and the episode fails to create sympathy for him as he clumps around killing people, both those he considers responsible for his condition as well as innocents, including a woman who tries to help him. Williams's performance communicates sullen anger more than suffering or torment.

Scully has all of Mulder's lines in this episode, and Doggett has all of Scully's lines ("Are you suggesting that...?")

"In my experience, dead men don't tip, Agent Scully."

—Doggett

BADLAA ★

1/21/01. Editor: Michael Kewley. Written by John Shibam. Directed by Tony Whamby.

"So there's this guy who crawls up people's butts and hangs out in their bodies for a while, and their gut explodes, and there's lots of blood and ooh, their eyes turn all red..." Normally this would be where the TV producer interrupts the sweating novice writer's big pitch and kicks him (or her) out of the office, with a "don't call us, we'll call you" kiss-off. But this is THE X-FILES, a show desperate for a guest villain you haven't seen before, so the butt-crawler idea is instead written up into a script, filmed, and, alas, put on the air.

Although the butt-crawler is new, the plot is pure X-FILES generic Monster-of-the-Week. "Badlaa" is, like "Salvage," a revenge tale. This time the aggrieved party is an Indian beggar, a Siddhi mystic (Deep Roy) capable of manipulating reality, becoming invisible, and changing his size. Our mystic beggar is using his powers for revenge on innocent (if arrogant) Americans because a gas leak from an American chemical company in his village killed scores, including, possibly, his son.

THE X(ENOPHOBIC)-FILES: A malevolent mystic attacks Americans at random in "Badlaa."

(This fictional event is no doubt based on the devastating 1984 Union Carbide poison gas leak in Bhopal, India.)

The working out of the plot doesn't make much sense. The mystic is, in fact, only another incarnation of the Other, the exotic, dark people Western culture both fears and finds fascinating—Edward Said, author of *Oriental-*

ism, would have a field day with him. With his squeaky cart (the noise often preceding his entry into frame), his gas-ravaged face, and the powers he uses to kill people, the character is indeed a frightening sight.

Throughout "Badlaa," Scully tries to investigate this case the way she believes Mulder would have, even bringing in his pal Chuck Burks for a couple of consultations. In the end, she becomes distraught that she can't be just like Mulder. But since when has she wanted to be Mulder? She has learned many things from Mulder, but why would she want to erase her own identity and her own instincts?

"You've got it all backwards."

—Rustic Woman

THE GIFT ★ 1/2

2/4/01. Editor: Chris Willingham. Written by Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Kim Manners.

Doggett goes to Squamash, Pennsylvania, looking for clues to Mulder's whereabouts. Skinner reminds Doggett that he witnessed Mulder's abduction, and accuses him of wanting to concoct a story about Mulder that will get him off the X-Files. Doggett insists he just wants the truth, and he has to work this one solo, because Scully signed Mulder's falsified case files. (Gillian Anderson does not appear in this episode.)

Doggett quickly figures out that the townspeople of Squamash are hiding something involving Mulder, but since no one does any more real investigation on this show anymore, we are shown the secret: The townspeople are safeguarding a horribly disfigured man (Jordan Marder) who eats sick people, then, in agony, vomits them up. The vomit slowly congeals back into the eaten person, now restored back to his or her original form, free of the disease.

Doggett eventually experiences the process first-hand. You would think after this event he would become a raging believer, but no, he's not changed one bit. It took Scully seven years to turn into a believer despite seeing all sorts of fantastical things, and Doggett's only in his first year. Maybe in six years he'll make the leap—if anyone's still around to witness the transformation.

"What am I looking for?"

—Doggett

"I don't know. Anything."

—Scully

MEDUSA ★ 1/2

2/11/01. Editor: Lynne Willingham. Written by Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Richard Compton.

After episodes about butt-crawling and vomiting, it's a relief to have one in which people die when their skin and muscle are fried away by microscopic sea creatures called medusas. The pesky little critters are lurking in puddles of water that have leaked into the Boston subway system from the bay. When an undercover Boston subway cop and a would-be mugger are

found dead in a train car, Scully and Doggett are called in to head up a search team, looking for who-knows-what in the tunnels. Scully decides to direct the investigation from the subway system's headquarters—she fears infecting her baby, but of course can't explain that to the puzzled Doggett—while Doggett will lead the search team as her "eyes and ears."

The tunnel sets are extremely effective, and allow a nice play of light and shadow, with flashlight beams cutting through the darkness.



So what do you do when your killer is a microscopic creature without purpose or malice and the search team doesn't grab your attention? The answer here is to create "dramatic conflict" between Scully and the obnoxious Karras (Ken Jenkins), the subway system's deputy chief. He insists that the trains must begin running again at 4:00 p.m. for evening rush hour, whether the search team finds anything or not. This episode is like all those 1970's disaster movies with the cliched, obstreperous official insisting the plane must fly or the skyscraper is fire-proof, even when the potential for catastrophe is staring him in the face.

"Parenti is my doctor. Is that so strange? Is there something about him I don't know?"

—Scully

PER MANUM 0

2/18/01. Editor: Louise Innes. Written by Chris Carter & Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Kim Manners.

Scully stares into a mirror—again—in "Per Manum" (as more of that annoying soprano wails on the soundtrack). She mopes and sniffles

her way through an "investigation" inspired by the techniques of Inspector Clouseau, treats Doggett like an afterthought, and ends up clueless as ever. Oh, and she really, really wants to have a baby!

It all starts with the Conspiracy's Evil Doctors. They are up to no good, impregnating women with alien fetuses, and since they want Scully to know *all about it*, they send undercover operative Duffy Haskell (Joe Acovone, who also appeared in "Demons") to her office. Haskell, in his guise as a long-



Mulder really dead? What do you think?

"This Is Not Happening" introduces a new recurring character, FBI Special Agent Monica Reyes (Annabeth Gish), an expert in comparative religion and satanic cults. Doggett brings Reyes in on the case, explaining that her background gives her a certain "expertise" that will help them find Mulder. What Doggett does not explain is why he thinks a background in comparative religion is useful towards solving an alien abduction.

Gillian Anderson has a marathon of weeping to get through in "This is Not Happening." She tears up or cries a total of four times, including some Olympic-level emoting at the end, when she delivers the episode's signature phrase in reaction to Mulder's "death." It's an artificial moment.

"Get out while you can, Agent Doggett, or you may never get out at all."

—Scully

DEADALIVE ★ 1/2

4/1/01. Editor: Regis B. Kimble. Written by Chris Carter & Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Tony Wharmby.

They bury Mulder at the beginning of "Deadalive" (in North Carolina—for some reason the Mulders of Martha's Vineyard and Rhode Island are all buried down there). Three months later, they dig him up and, guess what, he's alive! "Dead Alive," asks us to believe that a) an alien virus was able to reduce Mulder's vitals to so low a level that he could survive three months without food or water; b) nobody at the FBI—including Scully and Skinner—demanded an autopsy; and c) Mulder was not embalmed or cremated.

The pertinent info—that Mulder is suffering from a virus, not just the aftereffects of alien torture—arrives with Krycek (remember him?), who grabs Skinner's attention by dialing up his nanobite-controller. He presents Skinner with a choice: Krycek will give him a vaccine, developed by Mulder's father (!) that will cure Mulder (will someone please tell Krycek that vaccines *prevent* disease, not cure it?). In return, Skinner must see that Scully's baby doesn't come to term. Skinner never asks the \$64,000 question: why is Krycek concerned about Scully's baby? And how does Krycek expect Skinner to prevent Scully giving birth—kick her in the stomach?

"Mulder, you make it sound like this is a conspiracy."

—Scully

"Ooooh, there's that word again."

—Mulder

THREE WORDS ★ 1/2

4/8/01. Editor: Regis B. Kimble. Written by Chris Carter & Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Tony Wharmby.

Those three words are "Fight the Future," scribbled on a mini-disc by a man named Howard Salt wants to pass

continued on page 48



RECKONINGS: Scully has to confront ominous implications about her baby in "Per Manum" (left), while Mulder faces down the repercussions of his abduction in "Three Words" (above)."

time member of MUFON and bereaved husband of a woman who had been abducted multiple times and then died giving birth to what, Haskell claims, was an alien baby, begs for Scully and Doggett's help. Scully seems strangely affected by his story. The plot thickens when she learns her obstetrician, Dr. Parenti (Steven Anderson), was one of the doctors consulted by the Haskell during Mrs. Haskell's pregnancy. After some investigation, Scully realizes that something very, very fishy is going on. So fishy, in fact, that anyone watching this episode can smell every plot "twist" from ten thousand miles away. Sadly, Scully's own sense of smell is non-existent, and she comes off as a moron.

Scully's not the only dummy here; the Evil Doctors are right there with her. Scully visits one of their clinics, Zeus Genetics (ooh, continuity! Remember Zeus Storage back in "The Erlenmeyer Flask?") and easily wanders around the facility, overhearing a woman crying that her baby will be "like all the others!" She soon finds her way into a large room filled with dozens of jars containing malformed fetuses. You would think that Evil Conspiracy Doctors could find a better

place—perhaps behind a locked door?—to store malformed fetus specimens.

Flashbacks seem to be the only way THE X-FILES writers could figure out to use David Duchovny before Mulder's official return from alien torture. In "Per Manum," the flashbacks, which apparently go back to fifth season, not only reinvent established X-FILES history, but also reveal major new information about Mulder and Scully's relationship—they tried to make a test-tube baby!

And Scully still doesn't question *how* she got pregnant.

"Bad as you want to find Mulder, you're afraid to find him, too."

—Doggett to Scully

THIS IS NOT HAPPENING ★ 1/2

2/25/01. Editor: Chris Willingham. Written by Chris Carter & Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Kim Manners.

The non-search for Mulder reaches its highly anti-climatic conclusion in this unexciting episode, where Scully

and Doggett don't do anything to find the abducted agent. Instead, he comes to them, more or less.

Scully and Doggett and Skinner are on the scene—which happens to be Helena, Montana—because that's where the aliens have conveniently dumped Teresa Hoese (Sara Koskoff), a Bellflower, Oregon abductee taken at the same time as Mulder. When Scully, Doggett and Skinner get the news about Hoese, they rush off to the Big Sky State to question her, but find she has been tortured (a doctor blithely announces she is "circling the drain," a line for which *he* should be tortured) and is unable to speak. The trio wait around hoping Mulder will be offloaded next.

While waiting, they interview Richie Szalay (Judd Trichter), another Bellflower citizen they met last year in Oregon. Richie found Teresa while searching for his friend Gary, who had also been abducted. This kid has the brains to do what Scully and Doggett haven't done once all season long.

Richie thought he saw an alien in the field where he found Teresa, but Doggett tells him it can't be and shows him a plaster cast of the footprint from a Nike sneaker. So just who did Richie see?

It turns out to be alien healer Jeremiah Smith (Roy Thinnes—remember him?), who has also been waiting around for abductee returns. He wants to heal these dying, tortured people before they turn into... well, that's another episode. Smith has taken up with a Heaven's Gate-like cult which helps him in his endeavors. Using his shape-shifting powers, Smith disguises himself as Hoese's doctor and orders her to be transferred, somehow getting her moved to the cult's farm. Eventually Doggett, Scully, Skinner and a new character, FBI agent Monica Reyes (Annabeth Gish), raid the farm with a SWAT team. Suddenly there's a blast of light, the cultists vanish into thin air, and Mulder, returned by the aliens, is found dead nearby. Scully abandons Smith to run to Mulder, and Smith—along with his healing powers—disappears in the confusion. It's yet another manifestation of plot-induced Scully stupidity so Mulder can't be cured instantly and we can have a suspense-free cliffhanger: Is

THE X-FILES

Special Makeup Effects

Disfigured Corpses and Moldy FBI Agents Lead Team to Emmy Award

By Roxie Ray

Cheri Montesanto-Medcalf and Matthew W. Mungle are responsible for the makeup and special makeup effects on THE X-FILES. Although one could easily consider them modern-day alchemists due to their ability to turn materials such as silicone, gelatin, and latex into magic on the small screen, no wizardry is actually responsible for their career successes. Instead, they have worked hard since childhood to develop their talent and skills.

It falls to Montesanto-Medcalf and Mungle to make believable the preternatural exploits of Scully and Doggett. They must be doing something right—their efforts won them an Emmy award for Outstanding Makeup for a Series (Prosthetics) for the eighth season episode, "Deadalive," putting them into a rarefied, award-winning fellowship with X-FILES makeup artists Clinton Wayne, Laverne Munroe, and Robin Luce.

Montesanto-Medcalf, THE X-FILES's Department Head of Makeup and Special Makeup, admitted that she was surprised and pleased at the Emmy nomination. But as Mungle, who is in charge of Special Makeup Effects, went into detail regarding the work done on this episode, one could understand why it won.

The makeup crew had six days to do a body cast of

Zachary Ansley, the actor who portrayed Billy Miles, a character from a previous X-FILES episode whose corpse is found floating in the ocean. Mungle explained how the body cast process was done: "We used plaster bandage to cast the front and back of his body while he was in a body suit. We then made a fiberglass cast from that, which gave us a fiberglass positive of his body. Once that was done, my lab guys, Clinton Wayne, Ryan McDowell, Russell Seifert, Tim Considine, and Eddie Vargas, sculpted on top of the cast with water clay to create the proper look of a bloated body. Fiberglass molds were then made of this sculpture. After the body suit was created using a latex skin backed with soft

poly-foam, it was painted with non-tack PAX paints."

As this project progressed, Mungle took photos and emailed them to Chris Carter to get his input into look of the body. "The thing about this bloated body," Mungle said, "was we didn't want it to look fat. We wanted it to look like his skin had just taken on water and bloated. That was the tricky part of this."

There were additional tricky aspects to bringing Miles's body back to life. Said Mungle, "We had to do a bloated body, and then we had to sculpt it so that it would look dry. Yet, for the scenes in the morgue room, they wanted it to look a little wet. What we did

was put a coating of KY and a little slime on it to give it that slick look."

Later in the episode, the skin had to look different because Miles would be dried out and shedding his skin. Said Mungle, "The dry, flaky skin was created by using thin pieces of urethane skin glued to the dried body suit. It created the look of skin flaking off."

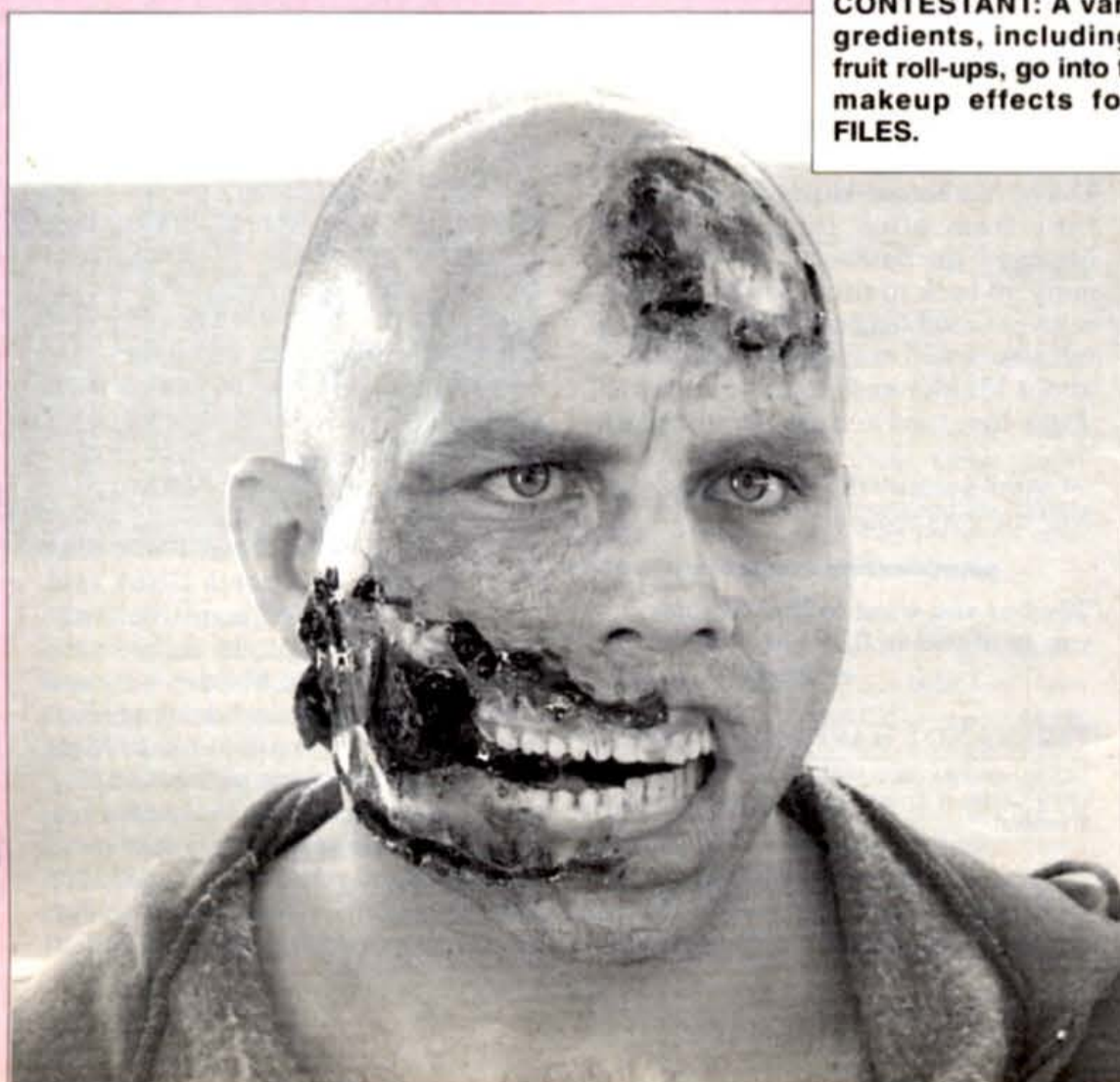
Looks were not only concerns for Montesanto-Medcalf—she had to consider how the actors' skin would react to the "Deadalive" makeup, in particular David Duchovny's, which would be undergoing makeup effects for most of his scenes. Mulder's appearance in

this episode is less than attractive: When found, Mulder is thought to have been long dead; in fact, his skin has become moldy. To keep

Duchovny's own skin safe, Montesanto-Medcalf decided to use egg whites and a placenta from a Swiss facial mask under the makeup. Not only was this good for the skin, but when it dried, it gave "this really cool, old, dried-up, cracked skin effect."

"Deadalive" was not Montesanto-Medcalf's first foray into Emmy territory. She joined THE X-FILES's production team in Season Six, when filming moved from Vancouver to Los Angeles. She won the award that season for "Two Fathers, One

ANOTHER LUCKY ELIMIDATE CONTESTANT: A variety of ingredients, including figs and fruit roll-ups, go into the special makeup effects for THE X-FILES.



Son." Her philosophy is to pay attention to the minutia that might not register on a conscious level, but that makes the characters truly live on the screen. When developing the makeup for characters, she thinks about their personal backgrounds and how they present themselves to the world. For example: "Say you have a girl in a small town that's poor. She's kind of like a white-trash-type of girl. We're going to give her chipped-up nail polish. Or maybe she bites her fingers a lot, so let's give her cracked-up, peeling cuticles.... We do put extra effort into it to make the show look well. It would be easier not to do this stuff but it makes the whole show look good."

Perhaps this was why Montesanto-Medcalf won the Emmy again in Season Seven for "Theef," one of the artist's favorite episodes. She enthused, "I remember Billy Drago was awesome—he looked so creepy after makeup. I just wanted this guy to look super-creepy and disturbing to look at, but real enough that you might be scared if you looked out your window at night and saw him standing there. I wanted him to look real enough that he would really scare somebody and *not* be a monster."

The eighth season was Mungle's freshman year with the show, joining the crew mid-season. He is no stranger to the Emmy award himself, having won for *CITIZEN COHN*. He also has earned an Academy award for his work on *BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA*.

THE X-FILES has three full-time trailers that Montesanto-Medcalf and Mungle have to keep track of: first unit; makeup effects; and second unit. This can be difficult, because different episodes are being filmed at the same time. Said Mungle, "With a show like this, time is of the essence, because every eight days is a new episode. We have only eight days prior to

prep the show and then eight days to shoot the first unit. Most of the second unit stuff is where the inserts go. Then we go onto the next week, when the next show is starting. It's a complete turnaround on this show."

Montesanto-Medcalf has much preparation to do for every



LOOKIN' GOOD: A water-bloated corpse (above) and a mold-infested Fox Mulder (left, from "This is Not Happening") netted THE X-FILES makeup team an Emmy for "Deadalive."

that, we start shooting."

Not only does the position of makeup department head require a person to be focused,

but diplomatic as well. The head deals with actors, directors, producers, and the studio. It is a delicate balance to keep all happy. Montesanto-Medcalf confessed that in order to keep a congenial atmosphere at work, she tries to "stay as calm as possible." A Herculean task, especially at times when, "at the last minute they change a concept on a big character or creature and you literally have to come up with it overnight."

But not every makeup design is done on the quick. Said Montesanto-Medcalf, "We do a lot of makeup tests. It's good because sometimes the translation between one person to another might not be exactly right. I always like to have everyone who has to decide see [a makeup] before the day we are filming. Then if we have to make an adjustment, we can fiddle with it. We know exactly what we are doing, [and] the actor knows what they're going sit through."

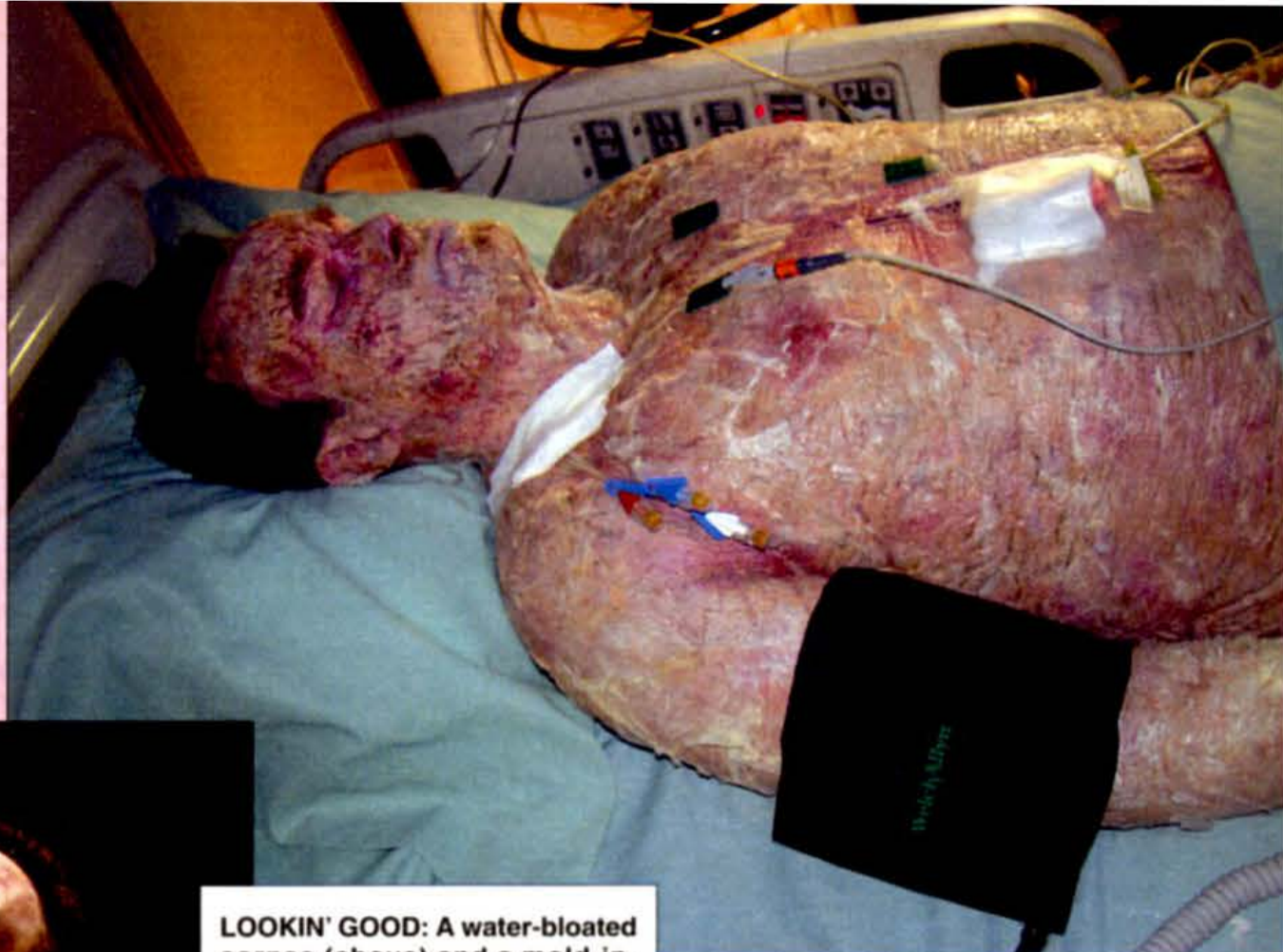
However, not all tests are done on actors who will be involved in the filming of an episode. There are instances when an extra is hired and then made-up to demonstrate a particular design to producers and directors, who then may make

episode. "I get the scripts," she explained, "I go into concept meetings where all the department heads toss around ideas. Then we start prepping, decide what kind of makeup I need to get in.

"Then I talk to the actors. Sometimes we have to have contact lenses, so I need to set up appointments with a contact lens doctor."

Mungle states that a concept meeting occurs seven days prior to the shooting of an episode. The full script is usually not available at this conference—if the group gets a teaser and two acts, they consider themselves lucky. Instead, the writer of the episode—usually Chris Carter—and the rest of the group discuss the direction of the story.

A day or two after the concept meeting, according to Mungle, "We have a makeup meeting in regards to what we need to do: What our concept is and what the director's concept is for the show. Then after that, we go back and get to work and do our budget. Money comes into play—how much all of this is going to cost. Within that time, some things may be added and some things may be taken away. Usually five days after



suggestions. Montesanto-Medcalf likes this process: "It's good—more time-soothing than consuming. You want to have it right for the first day."

Montesanto-Medcalf would not trade her job for the world. She also appreciates the support she is given by *THE X-FILES* team. "I have to say these people—Chris Carter, Frank Spotnitz, all the directors, and Kim Manners—they're all such wonderful people. They're so trusting and they just let you go.

"There's a scene in 'Deadalive' where the guy's fat skin gets showered off to reveal a thin body. They went to Matthew and said, 'Can you do that?' He said, 'Well, yeah. If we can figure something out, could we show it on TV?' They said, 'If you guys can do it, we'll show it on TV.' We do stuff you don't see on TV."

Mungle echoed Montesanto-Medcalf's sentiments. He highly regards Chris Carter and Frank Spotnitz, noting that both men are "very imaginative" and will "push you to go get more out of you, within the time allotted, of course.

"I have really, really thoroughly enjoyed working on *X-FILES* because it keeps my mind working: How do we do this and how can we achieve this? It's pulling from all of the years of my experience of working with all the products that we have and utilizing that to work for different effects. It's just really wonderful. I am thoroughly enjoying it." CFQ

on to the president. Salt's method of delivery is to hop the White House gate, get shot, and pass the disc on to a security officer with his dying breath. Is this an advertisement for the latest special edition DVD of the X-FILES movie?

Salt turns out to be a member of Jeremiah Smith and Absalom's cult group. Doggett's informant, Knowle Rohrer (Adam Baldwin) slips the password to him, and eventually it gets to Mulder. With the help of the Lone Gunmen, Mulder learns that that U.S. census office holds genetic data identifying people who are to be replaced by alien replicants in preparation for the alien invasion. Remember the alien invasion—the one they've been talking about for years but never happens? It must be the alien invasion led by Godot.

The first act opens with tremendously affecting acting from Duchovny. Mulder sits alone, touching his scars, flashing back to the torture on the alien ship. His face is a study in anguish and bewilderment, and we feel, deep down, all the pain and confusion he must be experiencing. Then Scully comes in and tells him he's completely healthy and Mulder tries to act cheerful (if with a bit of sarcasm), but we can see how fragile he is underneath his nonchalance.

After this it's back to business, with a vengeance. This episode is little more than a lost opportunity to explore the psyche of a person who has suffered torture, followed by months of burial. Even so, it's a relief to have Mulder back; his smartass sense of humor and anti-authoritarianism are the only signs of humanity left in this show.

"I feel like I'm stuck in an episode of MAD ABOUT YOU."

—Scully

EMPEDOCLES

★ 1/2

4/22/01. Editor: Chris Willingham. Written by Greg Walker. Directed by Barry K. Thomas.

We are asked to believe that a big-city New Orleans detective (the excellent Ron Canada, and what is he doing in such a tiny part?) can manage to mistake the booklet from a Marilyn Manson CD for an indication that satanic cult activity is involved with a workplace shooting. We are also asked to believe that the detective has not shown the booklet to the other officers on the case, or if he has, that they don't recognize it either.

Luckily for this out-of-touch-with-popular-culture investigative force, satanic cult expert Special Agent Monica Reyes works in New Orleans, so she hops on down to the crime scene. She dismisses the cult connection (she knows her Marilyn Manson), but when looking at one of the bodies, she experiences a vision of the body burned to the bone. The vision reminds her of when, as a member of the team searching for the murderer of John Doggett's son, Luke, she experienced the same vision upon beholding the boy's body. She tells Mulder that Doggett had the vision, too. Now we know the identity of the boy in the photo that Doggett looked at in "Invocation," and what happened to him.

At least Reyes's dialogue isn't as quite as convoluted here as it was in "This is Not Happening," but she feels

shoehorned into the show. And now she's psychic? And Doggett, too? Scully, meanwhile, is sidelined yet again in the hospital, but ironically, the scenes between her and Doggett are among the best in the show. She understands fear of believing, and she asks him all the right questions, even though she's drugged from pain medication. Mulder already seems like a third wheel to the Reyes and Doggett show, but Duchovny is so good, and Mulder's impertinence so refreshing, that Mulder enlivens every scene he's in. Even Reyes seems to come alive when talking to him.

"I'm sorry, but Agent Doggett is out fishing. May I take a message, please?"

—Mulder

VIENEN

★ 1/2

4/29/01. Editor: Lynne Willingham. Written by Steve Maeda. Directed by Rod Hardy.

Three more episodes to go after "Vienen," but this is the one where Mulder gets kicked out of the FBI, for real. Looks like the X-FILES writers didn't want to keep Mulder's departure for the end of the season, when it would have taken airtime away from something far more important: Scully's blessed event.

Much of "Vienen" takes place on an oil rig, and a lot of the visuals have a cinematic flair to them. The exteriors especially have a nice sense of space, with the pale blue sea blending into the even paler blue-white horizon of sky. Contrast these shots to the show's current visual style, which has become very claustrophobic, often consisting of close-up after close-up.

Freed from the bottom of the ocean floor, the oil aliens (remember them?) infect the rig personnel and continue drilling so they can infect the Earth. Two immune workers, Huecha Indians, are trying to prevent this. An infected worker kills one of the Indians, and the news of his death reaches Mulder, who, on his own, opens an FBI investigation. Before long, an executive from the oil company complains about the investigation, and an infuriated Kersh sends Doggett off to the oilrig, since this matter is now officially open. When Doggett arrives, he finds Mulder has beaten him there.

As action-adventure, "Vienen" is so-so. Except for the big "money shot" explosion at the end, it doesn't exploit the possibilities of the physical location. Scully actually comes off best (and Gillian Anderson, when allowed to play Scully's old decisive self again, is very good). The real point of the episode, though, is to male-bond Mulder and Doggett (nothing like a leap off a burning oil rig to accomplish that!), so Mulder can "hand off" the X-Files to...Doggett. Doggett? Hey, yoo-hoo! Anybody remember *Scully*?

"God, this really is an X-File, isn't it?"

—Special Agent Leyla Harrison

ALONE

★

5/6/01. Editor: Lynne Willingham. Written and directed by Frank Spotnitz.

Let's get this straight: At the end of the last episode, Mulder got kicked out of the X-FILES and the FBI. No chance of reinstatement. It's for real this time. Are the X-FILES writers even remotely interested in showing us how Mulder is coping with the loss of the job that has meant everything to him? Nope.

This episode is a monster of the week about an annoying scientist named Herman Stites (Zach Grenier), who turns himself into a man-eating reptile. Why? Who knows; who cares? "Alone" is also the X-FILES writers' idea of a tribute to fandom in the form of a temporary partner for Doggett, Special Agent Leyla Harrison (Jolie Jenkins), named after a dedicated X-FILES fan who passed away several years ago. Scully is finally on maternity leave, so Harrison, formerly in accounting, is assigned to the X-Files. The tribute is dubious, because Agent Harrison comes off as a hapless, over-anxious puppy nipping at the Doggett's heels, giddily hoping to encounter a mutant or alien.

At the end, she realizes she doesn't have the right stuff to be an X-Files investigator, even if she out-Muldered Mulder by being the only one to figure out that Stites is the man-eating reptile. No, all she wants to know, when Mulder and Scully present themselves to her in the hospital, is how they got out of Antarctica after their snowmobile had run out of gas. Could this episode be making fun of such fannish questions? Further note to the writers: If those plot loopholes didn't exist, the

scribes the process of conception (shown on screen with ova, sperm, and a needle to help them along—no real sex on THIS show!) and wonders if DNA contains the soul. (David Duchovny couldn't sound more bored, and who can blame him?)

Mulder then asks rhetorically, what does he tell the child; what does he tell Scully? Well, who cares what *he* has to say? It's Scully we should be hearing from.

But we don't. Scully is the passive, mostly silent Virgin Mother who is about to give birth to...Jesus Christ. Yes, her baby is supposed to be a miracle baby, "more human than human." They did this story a lot better in the New Testament (or, if you prefer a more recent text, Frank Herbert's *Dune*).

Scully isn't a Lady Jessica, though—she lets everyone else do the thinking for her, including her mother, who inflicts the most depressing baby shower in history on her. The male characters also take her over: Skinner, Mulder, Krycek—they all seem to have an unsalubrious interest in her baby, how it came to be and who the father is. It's about time someone asked, but again, that should be Scully.

When they learn that Billy Miles, the human-alien replicant, is doing the Terminator thing and killing all the "Per Manum" doctors, they propel Scully from pillar to post, and quite literally, too: Notice how all the men grip Scully's arm, as if she were a child and unable to make decisions

where to go. She's finally delivered into the waiting rental car of Monica Reyes, and the two gals zoom off for



THE HUMAN TOUCH: An accomplished performance by Gillian Anderson trumps the stock shocks (left) of "Empedocles."

fans wouldn't ask them.

"I can see why you gave up a career in medicine for the FBI, Scully. You've got *manos de piedra*."

—Mulder

ESSENCE

0

5/13/01. Editor: Chris Willingham. Written by Chris Carter. Directed by Kim Manners.

"Roadrunners" and "Per Manum" set the misogyny bar as high as it had ever been on THE X-FILES, and "Existence" raises it to a whole new level, beginning with the teaser, which is a voiceover by, not Scully, but Mulder. It consists of a metaphorical public health lecture in which Mulder de-

safe parts unknown, leaving the boys to do the action stuff and dispose of marauding Billy.

The episode is riddled with all sorts of nonsense. None of the offices have any security. Dr. Parenti's office has an unlocked, deformed fetus showroom, just like the one at Zeus Genetics. When Krycek explains that he wanted Skinner to prevent Scully's baby from coming to term because he wanted to destroy the "truth" before the aliens found it, Mulder interprets this to mean that there is a God. And if we didn't already know that Doggett was a manly man, we first see him cleaning his gun while watching a NASCAR race (on Fox, of course). Now there's a fine, subtle bit of characterization.

But clunky plot contrivances pale in comparison to the muffling of Scully. She is now merely a womb on legs, without a word to say for herself. The "essence" of this episode is destruction of a once-vital female character.

"What do you know about fair or right, Krycek? You're a coward."

—Mulder

EXISTENCE

0

5/20/01. Editor: Regis B. Kimble. Written by Chris Carter. Directed by Kim Manners.

Thus endeth the Mulder-and-Scully era of THE X-FILES, and what a load of sanctimonious crap it turned out to be! This dreadful episode is the culmination of three-and-a-half years' effort (presumably unwittingly) by the X-FILES writers to destroy the show's characters, who have all been flattened and crushed like Billy Miles in a trash compactor, but without hope of resurrection. Everything that once made

this show great has evaporated. No longer do actions have consequences, no longer do characters experience inner conflict or react to the world around them. Like every other storytelling arc the writers have attempted since the middle of the fourth season—Scully's cancer and Mulder's loss of faith, for example—this season's baby story is a miserable failure. It goes absolutely nowhere except to turn Mulder and Scully into the Stepford couple they mocked and feared in "Arcadia."

There are ways the pregnancy might have been handled successfully—for instance, if it had forced Scully to question everything about herself, her life, her government, the people who abducted her and violated her body—but THE X-FILES has shown itself incapable of any self-examination. It can't even remember events from episode to episode.

"Existence" slathers a cathedral's worth of religious imagery onto the birth of Scully's baby. A stained glass Christ adorns the window of the deserted, dilapidated house in which Scully and Reyes take refuge (the town they're in is called Democrat Hot Springs, Georgia—political symbolism with echoes of FDR). The house is dilapidated, but Reyes has time to fix it up into a comfy birthing creche. There's a bright star in the night sky and it guides Mulder to Scully. The alien replicants who had

THE (NE)X(T)-FILES: With Duchovny gone and Anderson maneuvering for the exit, the ninth season would fall to agents Doggett and Reyes to carry on.



wanted to destroy Scully's baby instead gape in awe, like the shepherds. Even though they're all unstoppable assassins, they all meekly go away after witnessing the miracle of birth. The three Lone Gunmen arrive later on at Scully's house bearing gifts, while Scully wears white pajamas and a blue robe—the colors of the Virgin Mary—and Mulder, who used to be Christ, is now Joseph! And if we didn't "get" all the "symbolism," hammily reverential music "inspired" by John Williams's score for the grail scenes in INDIANA JONES AND THE LAST CRUSADE, tells us it's time to kneel down and worship.

Does Carter really think he's fooling anyone with this plaster-saint religiosity? Grafting all this onto

the birth of Scully's baby doesn't elevate it into a holy event; it turns the birth into the corner church's elementary school Christmas pageant.

This is also Krycek's last bow, and his death is one of the worst scenes in an episode constructed of bad scenes. Krycek has been reduced from a once-fascinating villain to an inconsistent cypher mumbling about "the truth" and wanting "the same thing" as Mulder. The scene where Skinner kills Krycek is excruciating—but not in a good way. It's an insulting end to a formerly great character who never got the Krycek-centered episode he (and Nic Lea, who plays Krycek) deserved.

What a dismal end to the partnership of Mulder and Scully on THE X-FILES, and to two characters who once embodied the best of television writing. THE X-FILES' mania for hiding the "truth" about aliens, mutants, and conspirators has reached the point where all is confusion and inconsistency, and the "mythology" is so top-heavy that it has fallen down and can't get up.

But that is not the real tragedy here. The real tragedy is that THE X-FILES no longer does what it once did so beautifully: shed light on the true mystery, that of the human heart.

THE X-FILES

The Ten Scariest Moments

Want Some Sleepless Nights? These'll Do It.

By Katie Anderson

10 "The Calusari"

Season 2 Episode 21 (1995)

The Story So Far:

Mulder and Scully discover that eight-year-old Charlie Holvey is involved in the macabre deaths of his brother, father, and grandmother. It appears that young Charlie is possessed by an evil spirit—a spirit that just so happens to belong to his stillborn twin brother, Michael.

The Scary Bit:

Mulder turns to the Calusari to help prevent Charlie (or should that be Michael?) from killing again. The group of elderly Romanian holy men battle the forces of evil to exorcise the demon possessing Charlie. As they perform the necessary ritual, the bed begins to rise off the floor, a mysterious yellow substance oozes out of the walls, and Charlie, his face distorted with evil, begins to shout in an unknown tongue.

Shock Value:

If it was good enough for THE EXORCIST, then trust THE X-FILES to go one better. The only thing missing is the head-spinning and the pea-soup vomit.

9 "Terms of Endearment"

Season 6 Episode 6 (1999)

The Story So Far:

Wayne and Laura Weinsider, an expectant couple in their late thirties, receive some devastating news from their doctor. He shows them a recent ultrasound picture of their baby, and points out some prenatal birth defects—their child appears to be growing horns.



FLOATING A CONCEPT: Freaky visions intensified the graphic scenario of "Via Negativa."

The Scary Bit:

Later that night, Laura wakes up with a jolt; at the foot of the bed stands the horrific figure of a horned demon. Laura screams as the creature grabs her legs and drags her towards him. It reaches down and then rises with a wriggling newborn in its arms; a newborn with horns. The next minute, Laura wakes up covered in blood, screaming, and, it seems, no longer pregnant.

Shock Value:

Having your child taken away from you—regardless of the circumstances—must surely be every parent's worst nightmare. Once again, THE X-

FILES demonstrates just how apt it is when it comes to psychological horror, tapping into our deepest, innermost fears, and turning them into must-see TV.

8 "Chinga"

Season 5 Episode 10 (1998)

The Story So Far:

A terrified young woman, Melissa Turner and her daughter, Polly, flee their local supermarket. All around them, shoppers have inexplicably begun mutilating themselves—clawing at the flesh around their eyes and slapping their faces—as bloodcurdling screams fill the store.

The Scary Bit:

The butcher's attention is suddenly diverted when he sees something disturbing in the door opposite him: a distorted image of a rather large doll—Polly's doll. Instinctively, the butcher pulls out a knife from his belt. But the knife begins to

take on a life of its own, the blade curling back towards him.

Shock Value:

While the evil, enchanted doll concept isn't exactly original (who could forget Chucky?), Polly and Chinga make for one hell of a spooky double act. And the wounded shoppers, their eyes dripping with blood, is an image you won't find easy to erase. Babysitting this child would be anything but child's play.

7 "Memento Mori"

Season 4 Episode 15 (1997)

The Story So Far:

Scully's worst fears are confirmed when tests reveal that she has cancer: an inoperable tumor in her brain.

The Scary Bit:

Mulder meets Scully at the hospital, where she shows him an MRI film of her skull. A small dark mass—the tumor—is clearly visible on the scan. Scully explains that the positioning and type of cancer makes treatment problematic in the extreme: "I am as certain about this as you have ever been. I have cancer.... If it pushes into my brain, statistically, there is about zero chance of survival..."

Shock Value:

Certainly not an easy subplot, the sensitive issue of terminal illness is, thankfully, exquisitely executed. Although it could easily have come across on-screen as a sensational ploy by the writers to pep up the rat-

ings, this moment is as terrifying as any X-FILE has ever been, or could ever be.

6

"Orison"

Season 7 Episode 7 (2000)

The Story So Far:

Donnie Pfaster—a death fetishist whom Scully and Mulder apprehended five years ago—escapes from a maximum-security prison and goes in search of his next victim: Agent Scully. It seems Donnie Pfaster intends to finish the job he started before his apprehension.

The Scary Bit:

Mulder arrives at Scully's apartment, just in time to prevent Pfaster from carrying out his handiwork and places him under arrest. A bruised and bloodied Agent Scully approaches her abductor. All of a sudden, the room lights up as sparks fly from the ceiling fixture. Pfaster falls to the ground.

Shock Value:

On first impressions, this isn't exactly an obvious choice in the scare department. But who would have ever imagined that Dana Scully, of all people, would be able to shoot someone in such a cold-blooded fashion? The action played out in slow motion only serves to increase the impact.

5

"Die Hand Die Verletzt"

Season 2 Episode 14 (1995)

The Story So Far:

Four teenagers are messing about in the woods when one of the boys is grabbed by the throat. His body is discovered later with his eyes and heart cut out, as rumors spread through the town about devil worship and dark rites.

The Scary Bit:

Fifteen-year-old Shannon Ausbury and the rest of her science class are dissecting a fetal pig as substitute teacher, the supremely scary Mrs. Paddock, supervises the experiment. Shannon freaks out as she cuts

into the animal, the poor girl hallucinating that the pig has come to life. She starts screaming hysterically.

Shock Value:

It may only last a few seconds, nevertheless, the pig embryo sequence represents but one disturbing moment from an episode littered with them. Dark and creepy, this installment is as close to true horror as TV Standards and Practices will allow.

4

"Home"

Season 4 Episode 3 (1996)

The Story So Far:

The discovery of a grossly malformed new-born baby, buried alive in the sleepy rural community of Home, Pennsylvania, leads Scully and Mulder to the freakish Peacock brothers. They soon uncover the family's gruesome secret.

The Scary Bit:

Mulder and Scully's search of the booby-trapped Peacock property leads to a shocking discovery: a grotesque, disfigured woman hidden underneath the bed. It seems the Peacock's have been breeding their own stock, and we're not talking farmyard animals.

Shock Value:

Even by X-FILES standards, this episode is particularly shocking and, with incest the underlying theme, controversial in the extreme. Repulsive and almost impossible to watch, this is, unquestionably, one of television's most distressing hours.

3

"Roadrunners"

Season 8 Episode 4 (2000)

The Story So Far:

On a deserted road in the middle of nowhere, a young man, Hank Gulatarski, manages to flag down and board a passing bus. Seconds later, the bus stops suddenly and everyone



LIVING-DEAD DOLL: The carnage of "Chinga's" teaser has become a classic moment of X-FILES horror.

but Hank exits the vehicle.

The Scary Bit:

Hank watches helplessly as the bus driver and the other passengers proceed to viciously bash a disabled man's skull in with rocks. Once they have finished, they turn on Hank. He yells, but it's to no avail as they swarm around him like animals devouring their prey.

Shock Value:

If this opening sequence doesn't make you want to change the channel, then be prepared. Although the pace slows down a little, there's plenty more shocks in store.

2

"Fresh Bones"

Season 2 Episode 15 (1995)

The Story So Far:

A series of unusual deaths involving U.S. soldiers assigned to oversee the incarceration of Haitian refugees throws Scully and Mulder into a secret war between the base commander, Colonel Wharton, and a voodoo priest.

The Scary Bit:

The agents discover Wharton performing a voodoo rite at a local cemetery. While Mulder attempts to bring him in, Scully—who has suddenly become strangely ill—sits alone in the car. She starts to scratch at her hand, looking down in horror as another hand bursts through the skin and tries to choke her.

Shock Value:

Scully's hallucination easily gets my vote for the yuckiest, goriest moment...ever. Hard to stomach, no matter how many times you watch it.

1

"Via Negativa"

Season 8 Episode 7 (2000)

The Story So Far:

Doggett and Skinner team up to investigate a murder spree where the killer leaves no trace of his crimes.

The Scary Bit:

Doggett is walking down a hall, following a trail of bloody footprints which lead to a man hovering about three feet off the ground, in a lotus meditation position. He opens his eyes—all three of them—and stares at Doggett. Doggett looks down at his hands; he's holding a bloody, severed head: Agent Scully's. Freaked out, Doggett drops the head; the next minute, he wakes up. It was just a dream.

Shock Value:

Sometimes it's good to push the limits a little bit; to shake things up. And seeing Scully's severed head in Doggett's hands is a close contender for the most jaw-dropping moment ever. I very much doubt anything could lessen the visceral impact of this scene—the viewer discretion warning at the start of the episode is totally justified.

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Animation rotoscoping is the process pioneered by Peter Kuran, a one-time STAR WARS apprentice now with his own company which has honed the process to the keen visual effects featured in DREAMSCAPE. The complete story of Kuran and his career highlighted by numerous color photos. Also featured in this issue is the production of Tim Burton's short feature for Disney entitled FRANKENWEENIE which pays homage to James Whale's film but this time the title character is canine **\$6.00**



VOL 15 NO 3

The story behind Tobe Hooper's LIFEFORCE, his first film since directing POLTERGEIST for Steven Spielberg; the filming of RETURN TO OZ, including the dazzling clay-mation effects produced by Will Vinton; plus an examination of two low-budget genre pictures that turned out to be 1984's big sleepers—Wes Craven's NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET and James Cameron's THE TERMINATOR, with conversations with both of these versatile directors. **\$6.00**

VOL 15 NO 4

Behind-the-scenes with the summer of '85s off-beat zombie hit RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD, an unofficial sequel to George Romero's famed cult classics. Also featured is an insightful retrospect on the zombie film through the ages plus coverage of FRIGHT NIGHT and CLAN OF THE CAVE BEAR. **\$6.00**

VOL 15 NO 5

Director Ridley Scott (BLADE RUNNER, ALIEN) teams up with makeup master Rob Bottin (THE THING) to present LEGEND, what our reviewer terms "the most exquisite fantasy ever filmed..." Scott's fantasy extraordinaire features some familiar faces with RISKY BUSINESS's Tom Cruise and ROCKY HORROR's Tim Curry. Also included in this spectacular issue is Wolfgang (THE NEVER-ENDING STORY) Petersen's science fiction epic/racial parable, ENEMY MINE. **\$6.00**

VOL 16 NO 2

Aussie rock video stylist Russell Mulcahy's second directorial feature, HIGHLANDER, is the centerpiece of

this stellar issue. With a fabulous cover painting by Roger Stine, the coverage of this epic includes interviews with Mulcahy, Sean Connery, Christopher Lambert and makeup artist Bob Keene. **\$6.00**

VOL 17 NO 1

A detailing of the LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS phenomenon—from Roger Corman's '60s B-film to Frank Oz's big-budget blockbuster. Interviews with Roger Corman, writer Charles B. Griffith, Howard Ashman, the horror film fan who molded the off-Broadway hit, actress Ellen Greene and effects wizard Lyle Conway. **\$6.00**

VOL 17 NO 2

A fond 20th Anniversary salute to the original STAR TREK TV series. Stories on Roddenberry, composer Alexander Courage, and the makeup wizard who created the ears for Spock and a pantheon of other ETs. Also features interviews with the cast and crew, discussing the series in light of the sequels that followed. **\$6.00**

VOL 17 NO 5

This issue provides a step-by-step chronology of Lyle Conway's amazing creation of Audrey II for Frank Oz's LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS, along with a career profile of Conway since childhood. Director Frank Oz speaks on the difficulties of combining the elements of fantasy, musicals and effects and on his controversial decision to exchange the film's downbeat ending to a "happily ever after" one. **\$6.00**

VOL 18 NO 1

From the makeup of Rob Bottin to the effects work of Phil Tippett, this issue takes a look at the making of ROBOCOP, the original movie. Included are interviews with director Paul Verhoeven, producer Jon Davison and others. Also the effect of the literary field of "cyberpunk" on the look of science fiction movies is examined. **\$6.00**

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This special double issue spotlights the MOVIE POSTER ARTISTS OF THE '50s and their remarkable work in creating looks that were often better than the films they advertised. Over 60 colorful pages of art and profiles and interviews with the artists themselves. Also featured is Italian auteur Dario Argento's OPERA. **\$12.00**

VOL 18 NO 4

Swiss surrealist H.R. Giger is the subject of this issue which profiles his film work since ALIEN and also takes a look at all the Giger rip-offs that have come down the pike. The artist is interviewed in his studio/home in Switzerland and speaks frankly about his past experiences and optimistically about his latest film work—THE MIRROR. **\$6.00**

VOL 18 NO 5

The making of PHANTASM II and a look back at the original film which foreshadowed the success of Wes Craven's A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET. Wes speaks out on why he bid goodbye to the popular ELM STREET series in the wake of a third sequel. Also ROBOJOX, OUTER HEAT and CHILD'S PLAY are covered. **\$6.00**

VOL 18 NO 3

This popular issue featuring STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION provides an in-depth critical overview of the first year. Also



THE X-FILES

David Duchovny's Grace Notes

Creating Episodes That Re-Think THE X-FILES

By Paula Vitaris

With the broadcast of "The Unnatural" and "Hollywood A.D.," THE X-FILES's David Duchovny revealed himself to be a writer and director of great promise. "The Unnatural," a warm, gently humorous, and ultimately moving story about baseball and aliens, clearly was the outstanding episode of the sixth season. In "Hollywood A.D.," Duchovny turned a Hollywood producer loose on a tantalizing mystery investigated by Mulder and Scully, and the resulting "movie" is one of the funniest spoofs yet of the show.

In the second season, Duchovny shared story credit with the show's creator and executive producer Chris Carter on two episodes, "Colony" and "Anasazi" (on the latter he also participated in the plot breakdown). Other episodes for which he received story credit include third season's "Avatar" and fourth season's "Talitha Cumi."

Several seasons went by before he began thinking about actually writing a script of his own. "I didn't have the surety, the confidence in my mind that I could write a teleplay," Duchovny said.

"I was thirty-four, thirty-five, and I thought, *I'm never going to get it. I have decent ideas and I'll just pitch them to the writers.* It took me to the sixth year of the show to actually sit down and write one of my ideas."

Duchovny's first "written by" credit was shared with Carter for the seventh-season episode, "Amor Fati." By the sixth season, Duchovny was ready to write his first solo script, and decided he should direct it, too. His episode, "The Unnatural," is about an alien who falls in love with baseball so much that he will do anything to play the game. Said Duchovny, "The satisfying thing about it is that I had no help at all. The mentoring was done through having five years of well-structured teleplays to guide me through. I wouldn't have known the teaser, four-act structure—that's not an intuitive thing to figure out. Above anything else, THE X-FILES is a really well-structured, storytelling mechanism. So I had that as my mentor. It's the most satisfying thing I've ever done."

Duchovny and X-FILES executive producer Chris Carter, both devoted baseball fans, had wanted to write an episode about baseball for several years, but had never been able to find the right story. One morning, Duchovny was reading the newspaper—much like Mulder at the beginning of the episode—and spotted an article about a minor-league player named Joe Bauman. In 1954, Bauman, a gas station owner who had played for the now-defunct Roswell Rockets in the long-forgotten Longhorn League, hit seventy-two home runs and drove in 224 runs, for an overall slugging average of .916. "He played in Roswell,

New Mexico, which I found hysterically funny," the actor said. "So I thought, *What if this guy's an alien? He's hitting seventy home runs and he's an alien. There's my story—we've got an alien baseball player.* I told my wife [actress Tea Leoni] the idea and the next day I woke up and said to her, 'What if the guy's black and he's an alien and the reason he's black is because he doesn't want to go to the pros because he doesn't want to be discovered?' After that, it just all fell into place."

The alien's race also dictated the flashback structure of the episode. "Once [alien ball player Josh] Exley [Jesse Martin] became black, the story wouldn't make any sense if it took place after the integration of baseball, because after integration he would be discovered, whether he wanted to or not," Duchovny said. "I liked the sense of loss that is part of the legacy of black ball players in this country. There were players whose names we don't know who were every bit as good as Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig and all the names we do know." A flashback story also lessened Mulder's presence in the episode, giving Duchovny time for pre-production and directing.

The nighttime scene where Mulder instructs Scully on the finer points of batting is one of the most charming finales in an X-FILES episode. On one level, watching Mulder teasing Scully and Scully laughing at their fun

together is utterly endearing. But there is another level to the scene, an unspoken subtext: Mulder's desire to communicate to Scully what he learned from his investigation. The scene also complements beautifully their scene together at the beginning of the episode's first act, when Mulder is spending his Saturday researching in the office and an unhappy Scully, brandishing a fat-free tofutti cone, longs for weekend freedom.

Duchovny saw these Mulder and Scully scenes as his opportunity to write something warm and funny for the two characters: "I was tired of hearing the conversation between Mulder and Scully where Scully would say, 'Well, I'm a scientist. I believe in science and science tells me this,' and then Mulder would say, 'Well, I go with my gut. My gut tells me this.' I wanted them to have a conversation in which they are actually 'in' their dialogue rather than saying who they are, to let the way they speak say who they are, and to let them inhabit themselves rather than perching outside themselves."

As director, Duchovny had first cut of the episode, so for the first time he found himself working in the editing room. His editor for "The Unnatural" was Lynne Willingham. "We often start to shoot scripts that are still in progress, that's just the nature of the schedule," said Duchovny, "but I had my script far in advance because I was only doing one, so I was pre-

pared months before and I knew what I needed. Lynne [who began editing while shooting was still in progress] would call me if I missed anything, so I had the chance to go back and get something. When you're out there shooting, you really do have an infinite amount of possibility for where you're going to put the camera. The great thing about the editing room is that for better or for worse, once you're in it, you only have the shots you took, and you have to make it work from that.... It's kind of like growing up. You're like, *Okay, well, fuck, I'm not going to be an astronaut, let's just learn how to fly a plane.*"

Duchovny's decision to direct "The Unnatural" grew out of his occasional frustration with the show's storyline and his lack of control over his character, something he acknowledged an actor "has to give up" in a television series. He saw directing as a way of protecting his script. "Directing is a part of the writing process. It's the completion of the writing and making sure that your vision gets carried through all the way. I guess I've been disappointed in the show's execution. It's a little like music. You can tell somebody this is how this should be and this is how it goes, and they nod, and you figure, *We're on the same page, we're speaking the same language*, but it never works out that way. It doesn't. So you just go, *For better or for worse, I'm going to be the guy that executes it all the way. I'm not going to leave it up to somebody else.*"

Duchovny admitted that, as a director, he has his weaknesses, especially in his ability to conceive a shot visually. "I'm spacially backwards. I have no competence at all. I can't draw. I can't even conceive on a flat piece of paper in three dimensions. I wish I could. So I was really nervous going in thinking how am I going to move these people through three dimensional space. I also always feel nervous that I'm not always getting enough pieces to cut it together. What I do have is a kind of non-linear sense of how images reveal a story. I guess in 'The Unnatural' it would be the moment when Exley bleeds red blood, and in 'Hollywood A.D.'

it's the final moment when a piece of plastic makes zombies dance on a sound stage. When someone would say, 'This doesn't make any sense. Why is this here?' I would say, 'Because.' It makes poetic sense, and I think that when you tell a story visually you're telling it poetically. You're not telling it like a literal narrative."

Although "The Unnatural" was his first directing assignment, Duchovny felt he did not receive any help beyond what is usually given any new director on the series. "Traditionally, as a sop, TV producers will let a long-time actor on a series direct, but it's letting a monkey paint," Duchovny laughed. "The idea is, *Oh, we've got this mechanism of THE X-FILES in place and we won't let you fail*, which is encouraging, if also condescending. When you actually go through it, you realize both that you can do it, and secondly, that you do need a lot of help. Everybody who comes in to direct gets a lot of help, not just dumb actors who think they can direct."

"The Unnatural" was an instant hit with X-FILES fans, some of whom compared the episode's visual puns and occasionally mocking tone with episodes by former X-FILES writer Darin Morgan. Duchovny claimed that Morgan, whose work includes "Humbug," "The Final Rest of Clyde Bruckman," and "War of the Coprophages," wasn't as big an influence as one might think, although he greatly admires Morgan's work for the show. "Darin comes much more out of the history of film," said Duchovny. "He's seen everything. I come more out of literature. In that way we're very different, but I do think we are both kind of hellbent on subverting the seriousness of the show."

The tone in Duchovny's second episode as writer and director, "Hollywood A.D.," moved away from the pathos and low-key humor of "The Unnatural" towards something more outrageous and satirical, creating a story with a dual focus: a super-



DEPARTING SHOTS: Duchovny tried to move beyond stock characterizations when scripting the interplay between Mulder and Scully.

serious case investigated by Mulder and Scully; and a satiric look at Hollywood.

Duchovny's original idea for his second directorial turn was to write a story centering around Assistant Director Skinner. "I'm always wanting to write Mitch stuff, because I think Mitch is totally underused," Duchovny said. Initially, the actor considered writing a MIDNIGHT RUN-type episode for Mulder, Skinner, and two retired FBI agents. "That's where I was heading, and then it turned into 'Hollywood A.D.'" Skinner still has several stand-out moments in "Hollywood A.D.," particularly when he, Mulder and Scully all end up in bubble baths in their respective Hollywood hotel rooms and engage in a three-way split-screen phone conversation a la PILLOW TALK.

"Hollywood A.D.'s" fictional producer, Wayne Federman (played by real-life comedian Wayne Federman!), appears at first blush to be the stereotypical film-biz player: slick, fast-talking, unable to view the world as anything but one big movie. Naturally, the super-serious Mulder and Scully wish Federman would go back to where he came from (Mulder asks Skinner if he's pissed him off "in a way that's more than normal" to merit Federman's presence), but they eventually realize that words of wisdom may emerge even from the mouths of Hollywood habitues, especially when Federman paradoxically states that Mulder is crazy for believing what he believes and Scully is crazy for not believing what Mulder believes. "The idea was Holly-

wood satire, but that's too easy," Duchovny said. "There are a lot of philistines out here, but there are a lot of smart philistines here.... That's what makes Hollywood a crazy town."

Duchovny added that he took pride in "throwing the case away, because I knew people would want to see the whole story. I like it that it's so good I'm going to throw it away."

Like "The Unnatural," "Hollywood A.D." ends with Mulder and Scully together, sharing information about what they've witnessed and what it means. Duchovny felt that despite similar structures, each episode's conclusion showed Mulder and Scully in a different light: "They're slightly different in that 'Hollywood A.D.' ends on its own [with the zombie dance] and 'The Unnatural' ends with Mulder and Scully. 'The Unnatural' is more integrated into the frame of the characters in the show. 'Hollywood A.D.' is more of a release and happens behind their backs; they sum up the story in the way they think it was, and then the story sums up itself with the way *it* is. Mulder and Scully get what they need to get, but they still underestimate the power of Hollywood."

Duchovny had no further plans to write or direct for THE X-FILES. "The great thing about THE X-FILES is that I could cut my teeth on what's about as close to moviemaking as you can get on television.... I don't see myself going into television to try to create characters that could sustain seven years' worth of shows. I'd love to write and direct two hours at a time. I feel that's what I should do with my life." CFQ

ESCAFLOWNE

THE JAPANESE ANIME HIT RECOVERS FROM MISTREATMENT AT THE HANDS OF U.S. TV EXECS

By Andrew Osmond

At first glance, it might seem more than a little familiar: a fantasy world full of knights, monsters, and exotic races; a Japanese schoolgirl, whisked away from home to fulfill an epic destiny; battles; young love; and giant robots. Surely Japanese animation has done this before? The difference with ESCAFLOWNE is that it does it so well, as readers who've seen the TV version of the story know. The saga started life in 1996 as a twenty-six-part serial made by the Japanese studio Sunrise, also responsible for the never-ending spacewar franchise GUNDAM. ESCAFLOWNE relates the adventures of young Japanese heroine Hitomi

legendary robot suit called Escaflowne, which is worn in battle by a young Gaeian prince called Van. The story is told largely through Hitomi's eyes as she learns about herself, her powers, and what she ultimately means to both Gaea and Van.

The original TV serial's Japanese title

strong characters who mature greatly between the first and last episodes. (The version shown on American TV, as explained below, was substantially changed.)

Now ESCAFLOWNE comes to the big screen, in the form of an all-new animated feature called ESCAFLOWNE: A GIRL IN

GAEA. Viewers who have not seen the TV version shouldn't worry—this is not a sequel or side-story, but a complete retelling from scratch. The story set-up described above still holds true, but many of the plot details and twists, plus the main characterizations, have been radically altered. Kazuki Akane, who directed ESCAFLOWNE for both the big and small screens, ex-



NEW VISION: The feature version of ESCAFLOWNE offers ambitious redesigns of Prince Van (left) and the titular battle armor (top).

was TENKU NO ESCAFLOWNE (HEAVENLY ESCAFLOWNE), while it's known in the west as VISION OF ESCAFLOWNE or simply ESCAFLOWNE. The monumental *Anime Encyclopedia* describes the show as "arguably the best TV anime of the 1990's," perhaps even bettering the fan-favorite EVANGELION in "retaining its coherence throughout, and in its earnest devotion to fantasy ideals instead of arch irony." There's plenty of humor in the TV ESCAFLOWNE, but little of the crazy-cartoon slapstick or fan in-joking of many recent anime. Instead, ESCAFLOWNE concentrates on telling a well-paced, increasingly ingenious story with

explained that, "The principal idea with the movie was to make sure it could be understood by people who'd never seen ESCAFLOWNE before. So a sequel to the TV series was out."

Instead, the continuity was provided by the film's key staff, who had not only worked on the ESCAFLOWNE series, but many other major anime. One of the biggest names on the film was Yoko Kanno, often rated the best musician in anime today for her work on ESCAFLOWNE, the video series MACROSS PLUS, and the space bounty hunter show COWBOY BEBOP. The character designs are by Nobuteru Yuki, whose elegant, elongated figures can also be seen in the video fantasy series RECORD OF LODOSS WAR and the recent feature film X: THE MOVIE. The mechanical suits were designed by Kimitoshi Yamane, who worked on such SF anime as COWBOY BEBOP, GALL FORCE, GENOCYBER, and G-GUNDAM.

Both TV and film versions of ESCAFLOWNE feature inventive and unusual

Kanzaki, who finds herself in the beautiful but war-torn fantasy world Gaea (sometimes spelled "Gaia"). This is a realm where humans live alongside wolfmen and cat-girls, where warriors fight duels in giant, mechanized suits of armor, and where an "ordinary" Earth girl can change history.

Hitomi discovers she has strange powers, as well as a mysterious connection to a

computer effects, carefully blended with the traditional hand-drawn characters and backgrounds. (In the TV show, computer processing was used for such elements as a dragon's skin and a magic viewscreen.) Akane explained, "Basically, we turned to using CG because we thought hand-drawn animation had reached an apogee in Japan, and there was not much else we could do in that field. CG animation was a new kind of expression, a mode where we could experiment and test out ideas. In the TV series, the main problem was our tight schedule, which often constrained and compromised what we could do with CG. For the film, the main challenge was the larger aspect ratio, with the computers pushed to the limit to fill the bigger screen."

As in the TV show, the main protagonists are Hitomi, a teenage Japanese girl, and Van, the prince-in-exile of the fallen

Gaeen country Fanelia. However, the personalities of both characters have been radically changed for the movie, recalling the alienated, nihilistic heroes of such Studio Gainax anime as *THE WINGS OF HO-NEAMISE* and *NEON GENESIS EVANGELION*.

In the original TV version, Hitomi was a plucky, adventurous, optimistic girl, while Van was a brave but insecure youth with grave inhibitions about killing. In the new movie, Hitomi is a melancholy, listless, and possibly suicidal teen who wishes she could just vanish from Earth (as, of course, she does). Meanwhile Van is introduced in the middle of a berserk bloodbath, slaughtering enemy soldiers as he captures the ancient armor Escafrowne.

For Akane however, the TV and film versions show two sides of the same characters: "I believe every person always has totally different sides to his or her personality. For the *ESCAFLOWNE* film, we had the idea of a dark side to Hitomi, and that's where it all started. But in my mind, the film Hitomi is the same person as the TV character in who she is and how she reacts." Akane explained the movie's approach by referring to *ESCAFLOWNE*'s Japanese audience: "When we made the TV *ESCAFLOWNE*, we had a young target audience in mind, but 'young' can mean students in middle-school and high-school. And in fact, it was these students who supported the series. The film, which was made four years after the TV show, reflects what those same people will be feeling now,

which is probably doubt and darkness."

"That's why the film is more violent and dark than the TV show," Akane said, "and why the film Hitomi has more personal problems."

The film is certainly bloodier than the TV show, with the opening massacre only one of several gory scenes. But Akane thinks the underlying hope and tenderness of the TV show shines through. "The common theme of both the TV and movie *ESCAFLOWNE* is that people, no matter how different their backgrounds, can come to

BATTLE-HARDENED: Appealing to a more adult audience, the film version of *ESCAFLOWNE* features darker characterizations for young lovers Hitomi and Van (above) and the enigmatic Folken (left, below).



understand each other. The film starts from a different point from the TV show, but in both versions Van and Hitomi eventually come together." (There was a similar mix of savagery and tender romance in another recent anime feature, Hayao Miyazaki's *PRINCESS MONONOKE*.)

As well as Hitomi and Van, *ESCAFLOWNE* features a large cast of supporting characters, most of whom appeared in different form in the TV serial. They include Folken, a somber and ambiguous Gaeen who seemingly brought Hitomi to his world in the first place. Meanwhile Van has two female companions, the warrior princess Millerna and the feline Merle, neither of whom are especially gentle or tolerant toward poor Hitomi. There's friction between Van and his graceful fellow warrior Allen, who's more Van's rival than his friend. One prominent menace to the heroes is the demented, psychotic Dilandu, whose reckless bloodlust rivals Van's own.

ESCAFLOWNE occupies an unusual mid-ground between boys' and girls' media in Japan. In both Japanese animation and comics, a title is typically categorized as being either for boys (*shonen*) or girls (*shojo*). The differences are reflected in the plots—*shonen* titles tend to stress action and adventure, while *shojo* focus on romance and relationships. There are also stylistic differences. *Shojo* titles feature more montages and abstraction than *shonen*, while *shojo* character designs take the anime "big-eye" look to extremes, with thin eyebrows, long eyelashes and starry

eyes which manga critic Frederik L. Schodt described as "liquid pools of rapture."

What makes *ESCAFLOWNE* unusual is that it takes elements from both *shojo* and *shonen*. The story is told through the eyes of a girl looking for love and meaning in her life, while the artwork features *shojo*-looking characters. At the same time, *ESCAFLOWNE* has giant robots, grueling battles, and lots of pyrotechnics. "We paid great attention to making *ESCAFLOWNE* appeal to boys and girls," said Akane. "The movie version is perhaps more of a boy's film, with a greater emphasis on action. That comes out of it being a film and not a TV story. But we still wanted to ensure the film could be enjoyed by both sexes."

The Americanized *ESCAFLOWNE* was criticized by fans for its butchery of much of Yoko Kanno's incidental music (replaced by standard Saturday-morning filler) and its casual cutting and rearranging of important scenes, with the opening episode cut altogether. Did Akane see the American TV *ESCAFLOWNE*? "I had a chance to see one American episode," he said. "What made the biggest impression on me was the way the characters expressed themselves. In the Japanese show, there were a lot of silent scenes, where the characters did not talk about what was in their minds—it was left to the viewers to imagine what they were thinking. In the American version, the characters expressed themselves in a much more straightforward, direct way, and all the scenes with silences were cut. I think the people who edited *ESCAFLOWNE* in America wanted to emphasize the speed of the action. They didn't care as much about the emotions of the characters."

Happily, the *ESCAFLOWNE* movie should come to America more or less intact, albeit dubbed with several of the American TV cast reprising their roles. Does Akane believe the film will be well-received during its limited U.S. release? "It's very hard for me to imagine, in any way, how the film will go down in America," said Akane frankly. "Even when it was being released in Japan, I worried that I had put too much into a ninety-minute film. I'm very curious to see how it will fare now."

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CFQ Reviews

Don't Poo-Poo the Potter

By Andrew Osmond

Harry Potter stands for adventure—the lad who enters a fabulous world of magic to enroll at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. He stands for heroism—The Boy Who Lived, scarred by black magic, destined to confront the dark sorcerer who killed his parents. He stands for friendship—

There are two forces that led to HARRY's success. First, HARRY's core audience is children, whose passion for the fantasies that speak to them makes any other fandom pale. The same was arguably true of E.T. or the first STAR WARS, but this leads to the second point: Unlike those former films, HARRY POTTER is not a new work. Very strangely for a non-sequel, non-remake Hollywood blockbuster, it's essentially a spinoff, a by-product of a book franchise that's superseded any Jedi or extraterrestrial. Its child audi-

ence will judge it not for its own qualities but for its fidelity to the Potter myth.

weakest of the series. Both book and film resemble feature-length pilots to audacious but hazily-defined TV fantasy shows, with splendid openings, powerful set-ups, meandering middles and underwhelming ends.

Given the film's restrictions, it's impossible to see how it could be much better. The actors are uniformly great within the storybook reality (complaints that the kids should have been naturalistic miss the point). John Williams's music is undistinguished but totally serviceable. As for the resplendent

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

Warners, 2001. Starring: Daniel Radcliffe, Rupert Grint, Emma Watson, Robbie Coltrane, Maggie Smith, Alan Rickman. Directed by Chris Columbus. Screenplay by Steven Kloves. Based on the novel by J.K. Rowling.

STORYTELLER to declare in rich tones, "We must expect great things from you, Mr Potter." If there's one disappointment, it's that there wasn't time to show Gringotts' underside in all its TEMPLE OF DOOM glory, but the splendidly supercilious goblin bankers make up for that.

Everything's perfect until the school year starts, when the scenes become choppy, the pace uncertain and the thud of each plot-point more audible. What holds the film together is the unity of place. Hogwarts felt nebulous in the first book. On film, it's as solid as its handsome British architecture. There's a palpable pleasure in forgetting the adventure and just being *in* Hogwarts.

And the highlights are knockouts. The attack of the giant troll works both as spectacle and a fine piece of thud-and-blunder character animation (though no British schoolkid would refer to toilets as "bathrooms"). The Quid-ditch match looks a touch virtual, but its energy, invention, and excitement expose PHANTOM MENACE's pod-race as the embarrassment it was.

The fatigue only tells in the last third of the film. The dragon episode (clumsily truncated from the book) is pointless. The Forbidden Forest set-piece is so late in the day that non-addicts will feel more weary than thrilled, especially with a resort to idiot plotting to put Harry in danger. The show-down is exciting, but still as contrived and formulaic as in the book.

But no matter. What's gone before is more than enough. One awaits the sequels with bated breath

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bonding with classmates Ron and Hermione to form a trio that can take on the world.

But the blockbuster film version, directed by Chris Columbus and starring a galaxy of British thespians, stands for something more. HARRY POTTER AND THE SORCERER'S STONE represents, in perhaps its purest form ever, the power of fandom. Forget STAR TREK conventions, or *Ain't-It-Cool-News*, or month-long queues for THE PHANTOM MENACE. HARRY eclipses all these.

ence will judge it not for its own qualities but for its fidelity to the Potter myth.

The upshot is a staggeringly faithful film of Rowling's story, with practically every detail and plot point unaltered. HARRY is a brilliant movie based on a good but unexceptional book. What many critics—the types who carp that Columbus was insufficiently visionary, or that HARRY is less powerful than, say, WIZARD OF OZ—don't acknowledge is that the film's failings come straight from Rowling's book, much the

sets and costumes, they speak for themselves in every frame.

The first hour is the best, building on the strongest part of the book. The critics who complain HARRY is bland and impersonal forget moments such as Hagrid's door-busting introduction, or the exuberant homage to THE BIRDS as owls crowd on Harry's house and drop letters down the chimney.

Amid the crowd of stars, the truly show-stealing cameo is from John Hurt as wand-selling Mr Olivander, returning to his fantasy-guide persona from Jim Henson's

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 _____ Female

Education:

_____ some high school
 _____ high school graduate
 _____ some college
 _____ college degree
 _____ some post-grad
 _____ graduate degree

Occupation:

_____ film industry
 _____ service industry
 _____ professional
 _____ education
 _____ retail
 _____ other

Household income:

_____ to \$25,000
 _____ \$50-\$75,000
 _____ \$100-\$150,000
 _____ \$25-\$50,000
 _____ \$75-\$100,000
 _____ over \$150,000

How many of the following have you purchased in the last three months?

_____ VHS tapes
 _____ DVDs
 _____ Compact Discs
 _____ magazines
 _____ books

Which of the following do you own or plan to purchase in the next year?

	own	plan to buy
DVD Player	_____	_____
projection TV	_____	_____
stereo/audio equip	_____	_____
video camera	_____	_____
digital camera	_____	_____
home computer	_____	_____
Internet access	_____	_____
home vehicle	_____	_____

How many times in the last three months did you:

_____ go to a movie at a theater
 _____ rent a movie or DVD
 _____ purchase something on-line

How did you obtain this magazine?

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 _____ bookstore
 _____ specialty/comic book store
 _____ other

How many people will read this copy? _____

What else do you read?

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 _____ science/technology
 _____ hobbies
 _____ magazines for women
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CFQ Reviews

Middle-Earth Meets the Colonies

By Dennis Kleinman

A few issues back, while reviewing *THE MUMMY RETURNS*, I was reflecting on how digital animation and graphics had finally come of age. At last, humans and animated creatures could share the screen believably, creating a whole new world of cinematic potential.

With *LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING*, that potential is realized in a big way. Unlike *THE MUMMY RETURNS*, where the special effects had more personality than the live-action characters and the dialogue was as stale as a blueberry muffin from Starbucks, *FELLOWSHIP* is about as good as movies get—a full-blooded, beautifully paced piece of story-telling that both rouses the spirit and moves the soul. At the same time, as good a movie as it might have been without them, there is no way that Tolkien's masterpiece could be successfully brought to the screen without spectacular special effects. The technology of cinema has finally caught up to one of the great imaginative minds of the twentieth century. The digital future looks bright indeed.

It was a long road to the successful visual realization of Tolkien, a road previously littered with failures. Counted amongst the corpses was cartoonist Ralph Bakshi's own attempt to adapt one and a half books of the trilogy, an ill-fated attempt at feature-length rotoscoping that ironically robbed the visuals of both live-action's nuances and animation's boundless invention. One got the impression that the filmmakers were far

more concerned with how to get all those Tolkien critters onto the screen than with what they were going to do with them once they got there.

Not so this new version. With digital animation now offering an almost limitless range of visual possibilities, filmmakers are becoming freer to tell the story the way they are seeing it, without having to worry so much about how it will be done. It seems appropriate that the two biggest hits of the season are movies where wizards play important roles. This is how directors must feel these days, being able to bring forth new creatures, even whole new worlds, with a wave of their hands (provided the studio bean-counters approve, of course).

Peter Jackson has used the new wizardry at his disposal to wonderful effect. It is rare to see a movie where so much attention is paid to detail, not only visually, but in the performances as well. Clearly, this was a labor of love, and the desire to do Tolkien justice seems to have been first on the filmmaker's mind. The length alone—nearly three hours—must have given the New Line fits. ("Three hours? Our marketing reports say that only sixty-five percent of the audience will be willing to sit for that long. Couldn't you shave off about ninety minutes?") But sit they did, at least in the packed showing I attended. And they stayed to cheer at the end.

Despite its length, *FELLOWSHIP* kept me riveted for all but a few sequences. Truth be told, that's better than the book did. Jackson has made some judicious cuts, elim-

inating some of the more cloying characters from the original (Tom Bombadil comes instantly to mind), and keeps his focus on what moves the story. The acting, usually negligible in fantasy/adventures, was truly first rate; at once larger-than-life and touchingly human. Sean Bean as the conflicted Boromir is particularly effective. And Sean Astin, looking like Chris Farley writ small, as Frodo's stalwart companion, Samwise, brought me close to tears in the movie's closing moments.

As with any movie based on a book as beloved as Tolkien's *LORD OF THE RINGS*, it will probably be impossible to please everyone. That said, I personally felt that Ian McKellan's Gandalf, while nicely modulated, was a bit too warm and fuzzy for my taste. One of the things that I enjoyed most about Gandalf when I read the book, which admittedly was a long, long time ago, was the fact that the wizard wasn't very nice at all. He was intimidating, blunt, and irritable, showing his affection rarely, but to great effect. McKellan is a loveable old codger right from the start, wearing his affection of hobbits on his long gray sleeves. To me, this took a lot of

The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring
New Line, 2001. Starring: Elijah Wood, Ian McKellan, Viggo Mortensen, Sean Astin, Liv Tyler. Directed by Peter Jackson. Screenplay by Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens, Peter Jackson. Based on the novel by J.R.R. Tolkien.

Monsters, Inc.
Disney/Pixar, 2001. Starring: Billy Crystal, John Goodman, Steve Buscemi, James Coburn. Directed by Pete Docter. Screenplay by Dan Gerson and Andrew Stanton.

imagined, considering the failure rate of previous Tolkien projects. But while I was watching, I became more and more aware that the feelings it was stirring were far deeper and more immediate than those the filmmakers could have intended.

Looking back on how and when *The Lord of the Rings* was written, it wasn't hard to see why. I was always struck by how different in tone and intention *The Hobbit* was to *The Ring* trilogy. Published in 1937, *The Hobbit* is an entertaining, nicely written tale that involves many standard elements from English folklore, including a treasure-hording dragon. *The Ring* is a far more serious and complex work that is unsurpassed in its multi-layered depiction of evil.

What intervened between these



Lord of the Rings



the fascination and bite out of the character. Besides this—and some quibbles over the inclusion of the "Galadriel" segment, which I disliked both in the book and on the screen—Mr. Jackson has given us a rich, deeply felt entertainment that is many times better than anything I could have

two works was World War II. While Tolkien throughout his life denied any allegorical connection between Mordor and Germany, it seems evident to me that the overwhelming sense of dread and implacable wickedness that fuels *The Ring* is an artist's transfiguration of the Nazi juggernaut. (Jackson and his crew make this explicit by using Carl Orff-style *Anschluss* choruses whenever Sauron and his

CFQ Reviews

minions are on the move).

This monolithic evil is sharply contrasted with the charming, idyllic life of the hobbits in the Shire, and anyone who doesn't immediately connect these lovable, peace-loving eccentrics with the English middle class—an English middle class that was forced to leave its cozy, hobbit holes and march into the very heart of hell itself to save the world from enslavement—should rush out immediately and read any book by Charles Dickens.

The movie makes much of this tragic dilemma. Whenever the story slows down enough for intimate conversation, which isn't very often, the talk is all about how the world has changed forever, a chorus of deep regret with an accompaniment of nostalgia for the golden days before the great evil came into the world and our gentle heroes were forced to strap on their swords and march halfway across the world to confront God-knows-what kind of peril in the last place on earth you would ever want to be. While there is no way that filmmakers could have anticipated 9/11, the strong feelings that were being stirred in me was my own personal sense of loss and regret, along with the anxiety of having America's own young heroes strapping on their weapons to confront God-knows-what kind of peril in the last place on earth you would ever want to be.

At the same time, *LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING* treated its characters with such compassion, and its theme of loyalty and courage in the face of insurmountable odds with such conviction, that I actually felt better and stronger by the movies end. Now, that's *more* than entertainment!

A very different movie, but one that shows off equally well how technology in the right hands can work miracles, is *MONSTERS, INC.* Brought you by Pixar, the same lunatics who created *TOY STORY 2*, still one of the best examples of screen storytelling I've ever seen, *MONSTERS, INC.* creates a thoroughly believable world inhabited by some delightfully unbelievable creatures.

The fact that *FELLOWSHIP* and *MONSTERS, INC.*, couldn't be more different started me thinking a bit about the contrasts between British and American fantasy. The primary point of diver-

gence is where these movies take place. *FELLOWSHIP* takes place in Middle-Earth, a time long ago and far away, connected to ours only through the delicate strands of allegory, metaphor, and so on. *MONSTERS, INC.*, on the other hand, lives in a place not that long ago or far away—a factory town circa 1950's (Pittsburgh, or Cleveland, or any other Midwest industrial city). In other words, *MONSTERS, INC.* is about fantasy elements injected into a real-world environment.

This reality/fantasy admixture is one of the keys to understanding American-style fantasy. Everything from *MIRACLE ON 34TH STREET* to Stephen King to the fantasy films of Steven Spielberg take place not in fantasy settings, but in real ones. It is the juxtaposition of "magic reality" elements and their impact on the real that drive both the humor and the horror. Even *SHREK*, ostensibly a fairy tale, is suffused with references to the here and now, and Eddie Murphy's donkey is just one long stand-up-comedy routine. American fantasies that take place in purely fantastical settings—*WILLOW* comes to mind—are much less successful, and often have a contrived, self-conscious quality to them.

The reason for this tendency may be as simple as the U.S., a relatively young country, having a much smaller trove of traditional mythology and folklore to draw on. Add to this America's stubborn rationalism and distrust of anything that smacks of being "unscientific," and it would seem that the only way to get Americans to "trust" fantasy is to give it some grounding in the real world.

But whatever it is that makes America's real fantasies or fantastic realities work, *MONSTERS, INC.* has it in abundance. From the fully animated opening credits—a sly comment on the new digital reality, considering that the whole movie is animated but in a far more "real" style—*MONSTERS, INC.* brings us straight back to the movies and TV shows of the '50s and early '60s. The factory that our heroes James P. "Sully" Sullivan (John Goodman) and Mike Wyzoski (Billy Crystal) work in is also a vestige of that simpler time.



Monsters, Inc.

All the good guys in the flick are working-class ethnic types, while the head bad guy is a pure-bred WASP. (One of the wittiest aspects of the movie is that the filmmakers kept the "real" names of the characters so that you can distinguish their ethnicity, as opposed to calling them Slurb and Flyxapyddle.)

Like Ralph and Norton before them, Sully and Mike are a delightfully mismatched pair. Sully, true to his Irish-monster roots, is big, swaggering, and exceptionally good at what he does, namely scare kids into screaming. Mike is a neurotic motor mouth—read "Jewish"—who becomes dysfunctional at the drop of a hat, or whatever it is monsters wear on their heads when it gets cold.

The screwball plot centers around a little tyke named Boo who gains entree into the monster world because of the malevolent hi-jinks of Sully's chief rival, Randall (Steve Buscemi). The twist is that in the monster world, children are considered highly toxic. The scene of adorable little Boo terrorizing a restaurant full of big, scary monsters has got to be one of the outright funniest scenes of the new millennium.

Sully soon realizes that Boo is not only not toxic, but too lovable for words. This creates a true '50s-style dilemma: Should the popular, successful Sully risk his job and his status in order to help someone that his society considers a pariah? One can almost hear Senator McCarthy pounding his gavel in the background. Of course, Sully

makes the right choice and saves Boo, the factory, the day, and anything else in the movie that is worth saving.

But as with all Pixar movies, getting there is one hell of a fun ride. The animation, as to be expected, is superb. The performers are uniformly wonderful, with special kudos given to little Boo (Mary Gibbs), whose inarticulate jabber captures the very essence of unbridled childhood enthusiasm. The factory is crammed with monsters of all shapes and sizes, each one funnier than the last. My personal favorite was the janitor/slug that spends the whole day mopping up the trail of slime that he, himself, is leaving behind. As in *TOY STORY 2*, clever plot twists abound and send the already manic storyline into hyper-drive.

This deep understanding of the power of plot is where I believe *MONSTERS, INC.* has it all over a clever, though less satisfying, movie like *SHREK*. *SHREK* felt stunted because the big green lug didn't have to fight hard enough in the third act to save the girl he had grown to love. *MONSTERS, INC.*, on the other hand, ends the second act with a classic plot twist, landing our heroes in the North Pole with no way of getting back to save poor Boo from the clutches of the bad guys. The fact that the creators of *MONSTERS, INC.* conceived of a way that was funny, exciting, and made perfect "monster" sense is one of the things that make it a complete, and completely wonderful, movie. CFQ

CFQ Reviews

FILM RATINGS

- Must see
- Excellent
- Good
- Mediocre
- Read a Book

SCOTLAND, PA

Writer/Director: Billy Morrissette, Lot 47, 2002. With: Jame LeGros, Maura Tierney, Christopher Walken, Andy Dick. 104 mins.

Hand it to Billy Morrissette. Your average filmmaker, having come up with the idea of porting Shakespeare's *Macbeth* over to small-town Pennsylvania in the '70s and setting it in a fast-food restaurant, would probably just pop a Valium and try to calm down. Morrissette not only went full-bore into the project, he kept piling on ideas that, on paper, sound like what happens when one is really trying too hard (MacDuff is a detective *and* a vegetarian *and* Chris Walken), but on the screen are pulled off with such finesse that they don't call attention to themselves as quirkiness for quirkiness's sake. Academics will have fits—Morrissette felt no compunction about adhering to the text—but in its creative retooling of a classic play, *SCOTLAND, PA* proves that a great story is a great story, whatever the setting.

●●● Dan Persons

KATE & LEOPOLD

Writer/Director: James Mangold, Miramax, 2001. With: Meg Ryan, Hugh Jackman, Liev Schreiber, Natasha Lyonne, Breckin Meyer. 121 mins.

KATE & LEOPOLD is a middling affair, a standard romantic-comedy; subgenre: time travel and fish-out-of-water. Think *TIME AFTER TIME* but without that

film's energy or wit. The lovers this time are Leopold, the Duke of Albany (Hugh Jackman) and marketing executive Kate McKay (Meg Ryan). When Leopold is accidentally transported from 1876 New York to 2001 New York, it doesn't take long for the two to meet and, after the usual butting of heads, to fall in love. The courtly, chivalrous, and well-spoken Leopold is just what burned-out Kate needs after a life of bad romances and career striving. At the end, Leopold returns to 1876; will Kate follow her true love?

Meg Ryan has played this role a dozen times before, although this is certainly the most grating variant. She comes off best in Kate's workplace scenes; unfortunately, someone thought it would be funny to have Kate fall on her tush in front of her colleagues at important moments. It's not. Seems that Hollywood just can't stand to see a smart woman on screen without ridiculing her.

There is one very good reason to see *KATE & LEOPOLD*, and his name is Hugh Jackman. Jackman proves, as he did as Wolverine in *X-MEN*, that he is both an extraordinary screen presence and an immensely gifted actor. He could have coasted on his good looks and innate charm (Leopold is supposed to be a hunk, after all), but instead he completely invests himself in the character, giving Leopold genuine soul, dignity, and a stalwart masculinity that saves his exceedingly well-mannered character from foppishness. He is also happens to be very funny in the comedic moments.

Scotland, PA

Would someone please give this man a decent script?

●● Paula Vitaris

FRAILTY

Director: Bill Paxton. Lions Gate, 2002. Starring Bill Paxton, Matthew McConaughey, Powers Boothe, Matt O'Leary, Jeremy Sumpter. 100 mins.

Dad is loving, hardworking... and God's instrument of justice on Earth. Bill Paxton's directorial debut, told from the point of view of two sons who are being indoctrinated by their father into the grim business of meting out bloody retribution, reaches its greatest horror in the conjunction of the manly blandness of its common-Joe patriarch (Paxton himself) against the gruesome avidity of his "God-given" calling—it's as if Atticus Finch had gone psycho.

Given the child's POV, there was the potential here for a descent into Hell the likes of which we haven't seen since *NIGHT OF THE HUNTER*, but Paxton mostly eschews expressionist tropes for a more straightforward filmmaking style. That restraint—along with a flashback structure necessary, but also intrusive, to the storyline and an ill-advised leap into the meat of the plot before we've fully become acquainted with what the film defines as normality—robs *FRAILTY* of some of its impact. Nevertheless, this is a welcome, and intelligent, break from the slasher pack, with an ending that raises intriguing questions about all we've witnessed before.

●● Dan Persons

MULHOLLAND DRIVE

Writer/Director: David Lynch. Universal, 2001. With: Naomi Watts, Laura Harring, Justin Theroux, Ann Miller, Dan Hedaya. 146 mins.

The new David Lynch thriller, which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in Sept. 2001, will no doubt please anyone with a penchant for the bizarre. A car crash disrupts a murder plot. The sole survivor, a beautiful, dark-haired woman (Laura Elena Harring) carrying a purse full of money, suffers amnesia, and wanders into a Hollywood villa to rest. Meanwhile, the apartment is rented by a fresh-faced, young Hollywood hopeful (Naomi Watts) from Deep River, Ontario. Finding the sleeping woman in her bedroom, she attempts to help the stranger regain her memory, at the same time investigat-

ing the bizarre circumstances that brought them together. Eventually, the search leads to a murdered woman, and more unanswered questions than the pair started with.

Their lives intersect with that of a film director (Theroux) who is pressured by the mob into hiring an actress he doesn't want for a key role in his movie. His wife is having an affair with another man, forcing the director to stay in sleazy hotels and meet with mysterious characters who make it clear that he has no choice in the casting of his film.

The film is a scathing attack on the shallowness and decadence of Hollywood. Like many of Lynch's previous films, every detail has symbolic significance, yet exactly what that significance is changes from scene to scene. Lynch's visual payoffs shock and amuse with equal vigor—whether you are satisfied by its outcome or not, *MULHOLLAND DRIVE* is sure to leave its impact. Coming out into the open air after viewing this film is a surreal experience, as if one's own reality is somehow in question, and coincidences and chance meetings exist to be pondered, rather than dismissed.

Much like a David Lynch film.

●●● Paul Wardle

BOOGIEPOP PHANTOM

Director: Takeshi Watanabe. Right Stuff, 2001. Voice talent: Kaori Shimizu, Yuu Asakawa, Mayumi Asano.

Strange things are happening in a nameless city. An electrical discharge causes computers to go haywire; children are disappearing in crimes reminiscent of an epidemic of abductions that occurred several years ago; and, all over town, people are whispering about the night being ruled by a dark angel come to claim the souls of random victims: Boogiepop.

Newcomers to anime might be impressed by *BOOGIEPOP PHANTOM*'s naturalistic art and muted color palette. Those more familiar with Japanimation might recognize the style of this series as being inspired by the far superior cyber-enigma show, *SERIAL EXPERIMENTS: LAIN*. While *BOOGIEPOP PHANTOM* tries for an aura of mystery, the writing mistakes vagueness for depth. It's intriguing, but will it pay off?

And besides, could anyone be afraid of a phantom named Boogiepop?

● Dan Persons

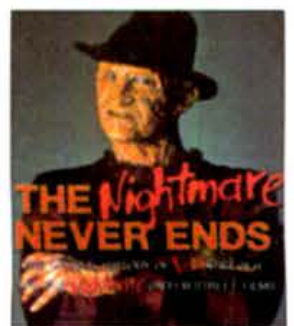




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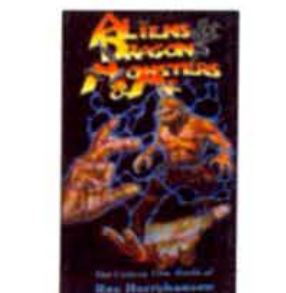
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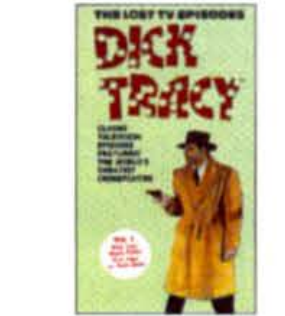
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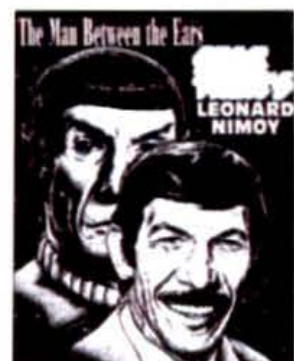
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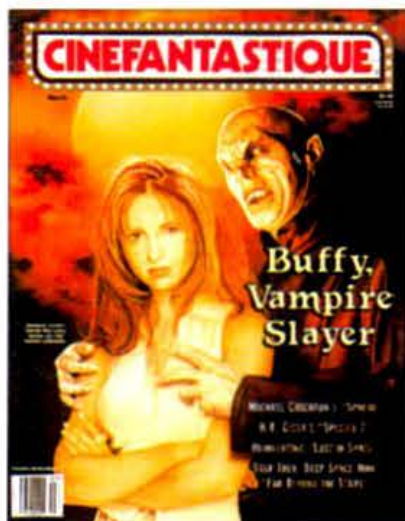
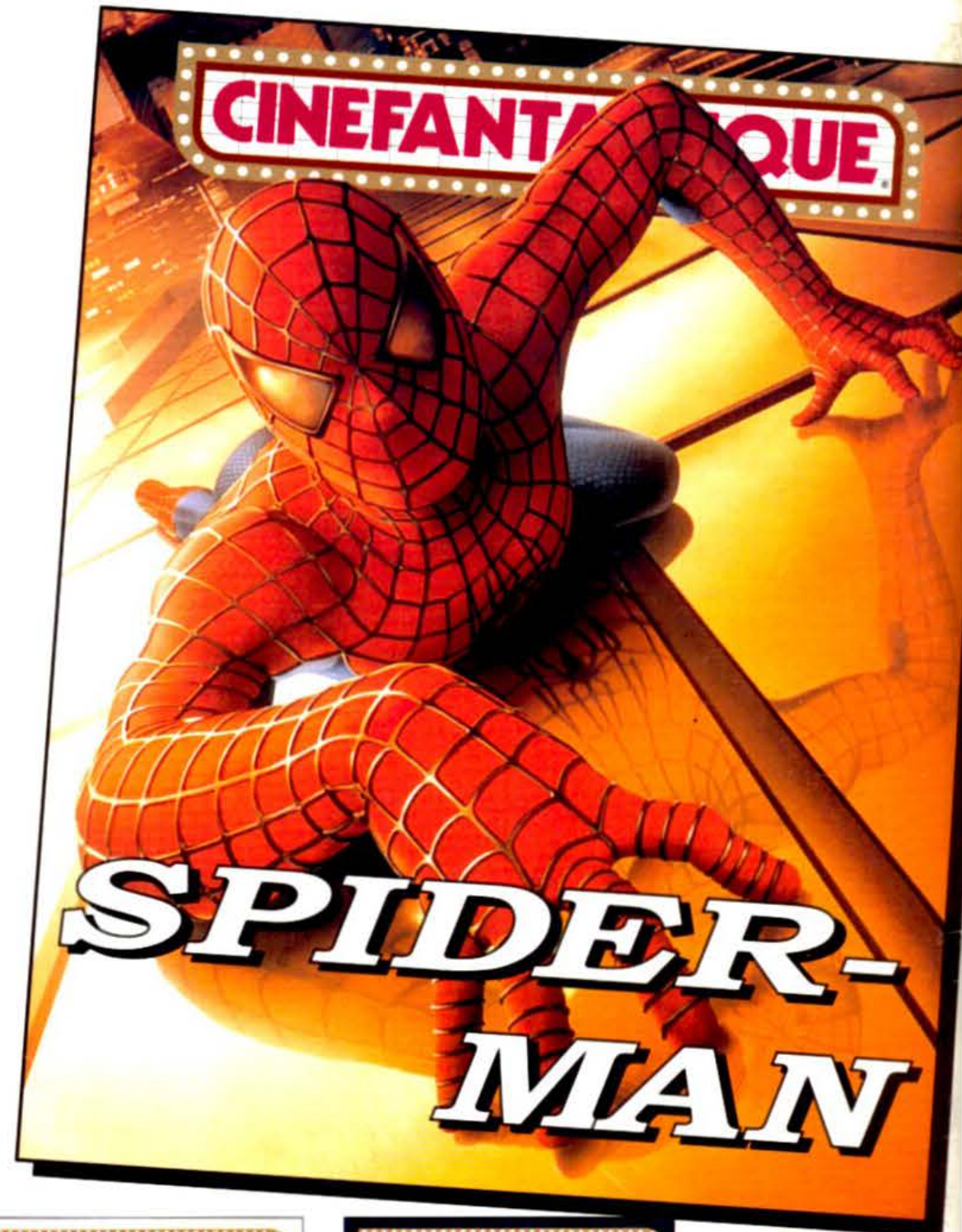
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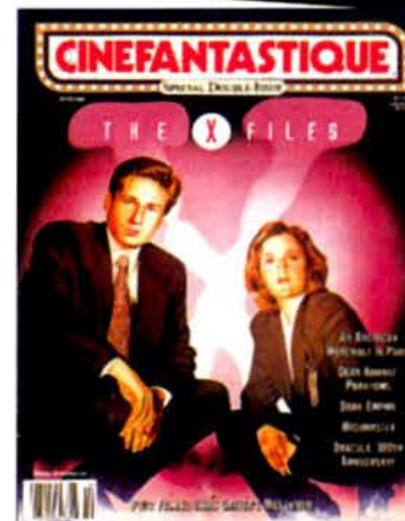
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